SEPTEMBER 1995

LOUIS L'AMOUR WESTERN MAGAZINE

WIS 04376

Continuity

A New Short Story by

Elmer Kelton

PLUS

A Trip through
Billy the Kid Country

And a Profile of
Buffalo Bill Cody

An Interview with Cowboy Poet
Baxter Black
by Dale L. Walker

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BY ELANA LORE

As I was sitting down to write this column, I happened to notice a common thread among our authors. While we do buy manuscripts from writers across the country, all but two of the stories in this issue are by Texans.

Johnny D. Boggs is one of them. "Blue" is his first story for us, although he has had several published in other magazines. His life seems to be filled with writing—he is by day the co-copy desk chief/sports for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. He has confessed that he has a tendency to find forts, battlefields, graveyards, and ghost towns on vacations, which his wife "lovingly tolerates."

We also have another of Riley Froh's Abner Butler adventures, which are set in Texas during the Depression. Riley has strong ties to the state. As I mentioned in an earlier issue, he is descended from the original settlers of the Sterling C. Robertson Colony established in Mexican Texas in 1833. And by day he teaches Texas history at San Jacinto College.

El Paso writer Dale L. Walker has done another excellent interview for us—this time of cowboy poet Baxter Black, who is known to millions from his appearances on the "Tonight Show." We also have three of Baxter's best-loved poems.

We are honored to have a new short story in this issue by Elmer Kelton, a lifelong West Texan who lives in San Angelo. Elmer just received the Best Novel of the West Spur Award from Western Writers of America for his Doubleday hardcover, *The Far Canyon*. The Bantam Books paperback edition will be available in October.

He has won a total of five Golden Spur Awards from Western Writers of America, Inc., four Western Heritage Wrangler Awards from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, plus other awards and honors from the Western Literature Association and the Texas Institute of Letters.

In addition, two of his novels—*The Day the Cowboys Quit* and *The Time It Never Rained*—appear on Western Writers of America's 1977 list of the twenty-five best western novels of all time.

In an interview in *LLWM* last year, Elmer said, "If there is a common theme in my stories, it is the challenge of changing times. This is a universal problem, and a timeless one. We don't have to create a white hat and a black hat to make a story. We can use two gray hats—one trying to bring about change and one trying to resist it." You will find that theme central to his story, "Continuity." ■

The cover painting, by Robert McGinnis, depicts Big Ned's last robbery—of Jack Lloyd's freight office, south of Laramie, Wyoming. Big Ned was captured by a posse on his way north to meet his confederates and was hanged in Laramie on October 18, 1868.

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A WORLD PREMIERE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE HORSE

THE APPRENTICE

The aroma of kerosene and the metallic bite of printer's ink had filled the air in the long room. As the metal press clanked and rumbled, inking the first sheet of newsprint, Eli Tobson, the editor, grabbed up the sheet and squinted at the page.

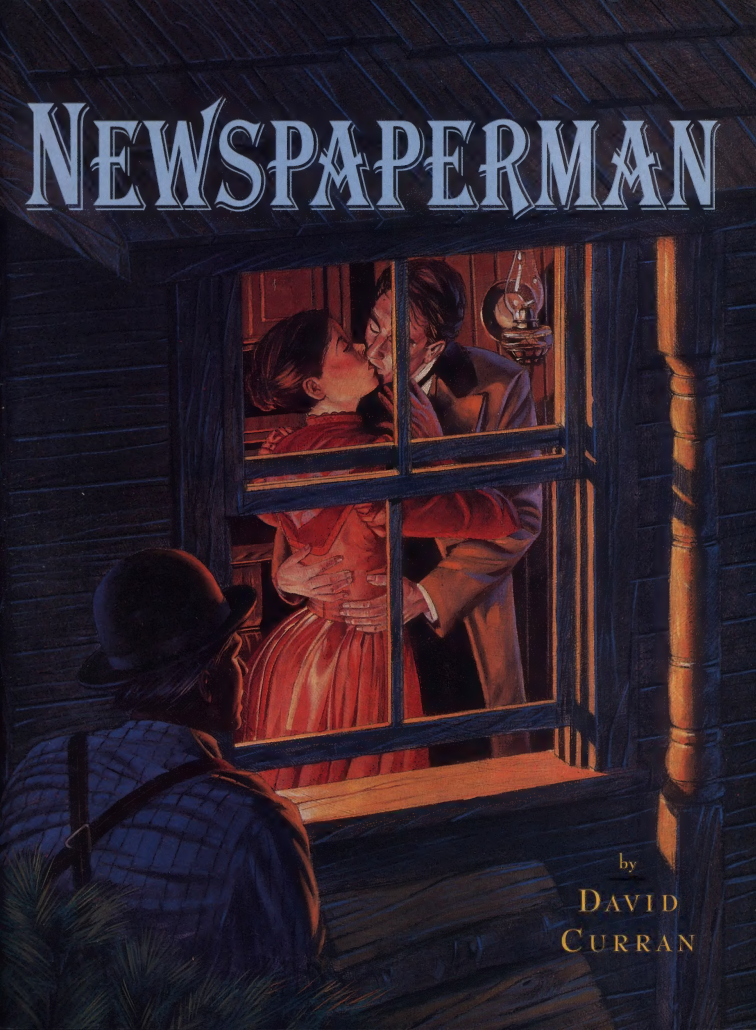
"Watch the ink in that lower corner, boy," Eli said sharply. "It's a bit too heavy." Eddie Roberts, his nephew and apprentice, was a thin boy of fifteen, as covered in ink spots as freckles. Eddie nodded slowly.

As the tinkle of the bell over the door by the large front windows turned Eli Tobson around, Eddie stuck his tongue out at his uncle's back. Eddie had wanted to be a newspaperman and had begged his parents until they had apprenticed him to his uncle. Working for his Uncle Eli, though, had not been anything like Eddie had imagined.

ILLUSTRATION BY DEREK MUELLER

DEREK MUELLER

NEWSPAPERMAN



by

DAVID CURRAN

tacey's fingertips grazed Eli's hand and Eddie saw Eli flush. There weren't many unmarried women in town.

Eli looked up over wire spectacles at the young woman who had just entered the newspaper office and brushed back the fuzzy gray hair peeking out from beneath his strap-on editor's cap. It was surprising enough to have a woman enter the office, but this woman was right comely. She wore a dress of light brown with gray lace. The brown matched, or seemed to match, the deep color of her eyes. Dark hair cascaded down over her shoulders from beneath an inexpensive brown hat.

"May I help you, ma'am?" Eli asked, sounding businesslike, as always.

"Yes, please." The woman's voice was soft and melodious. She was no more than a girl, really, Eddie thought—not more than nineteen if a day. He found himself heading for the counter.

The woman smiled at Eli and past him at Eddie. Eli turned. "Please get back to work, Edward," he said loudly and firmly.

"Now, ma'am," Eli said, turning back to her and smiling. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you take advertisements?"

"Oh, yes, of course. We pride ourselves on our advertisements. Let me guess. You are starting a new business in town. A hat shop, perhaps? I can assure you our paper is read all over the territory." The little mountain town of Garnet, Montana, in which Eli had set up shop, was booming. More and more business was coming in as each new mine opened. Eddie caught a faint whiff of vanilla extract. This woman even smelled good. For the first time he noticed the pockets of dust in the shop that he had been too busy to clean up.

"I have been thinking of a hat shop." She paused a second. "But this advertisement is of a personal nature. You do take such advertisements, do you not?"

"Of course, of course."

"And the cost?"

"Well, of course, that depends on the size of the advertisement," Eli said.

"But we're real inexpensive," Eddie called from the press, which he was cranking slowly, his hip pushing the bar.

"I'll handle this, Eddie." Eli scolded more gently than he would have if the woman had not been present.

"I have fifteen dollars to spend. Is that enough?"

"Fifteen dollars will buy you half a page. Do you really need that large an advertisement?"

"Oh, dear. I was hoping for a full page." Her cheerful expression seemed to crumble.

Eddie guessed that Eli would give her the page. If she were considering a millinery shop, cultivating her now would just be good business. Besides, the current paper was only one page. It would cost him no more to print a full page advertisement on the back than it would to print a half page. "Well, we do like to give new customers a chance to see how well ads in our paper work. So I think, this first time, I can give you a discount. In fact, I can get it in this issue if you like, Miss . . .?"

"Hopkins. Miss Stacey Hopkins. I'm most grateful." From a little purse that jingled with coins, she took out the money and placed it in his hand.

Her fingertips grazed Eli's hand and Eddie saw Eli flush. There weren't many unmarried women in town, and there was no one as pretty as this.

She turned to go, and Eli caught her by touching her shoulder. "The advertisement, ma'am? I need to know what it is to say."

"I'm staying at the new hotel. Could I send it over with a boy in a little while? I'd like to touch it up just a bit. I just thought of something I'd like to add. It won't take long."

"Well, we're rolling now." With feigned gallantry he slid his gold watch from his pocket and gazed at the dial. "Can I count on it in an hour, then?"

"Yes, of course," Miss Hopkins said. She smiled and headed for the door.

The door of the shop opened less than thirty minutes later. A dirt-covered boy stopped in the doorway, not daring to step inside.

"What is it?" Eli snapped. They were pushing papers through the press as fast as they could and he was tired. Sweat bled the ink stains on both Eli's and Eddie's foreheads.

"Lady at the hotel gave me this to give to you."

"Oh, well, why didn't you say so," Eli said. He came and took the paper from the boy, who looked up at him expectantly. Eli frowned,

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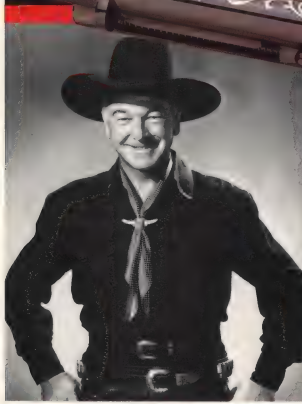

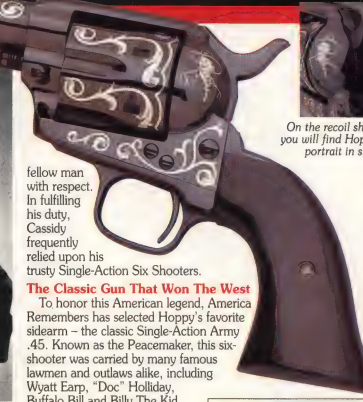

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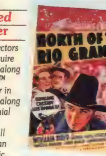

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o buts about it, sir," the gambler said. "You made a deal with this woman, and you are bound to honor it."

dug in his pocket for a penny, and flipped it to the boy.

"Just a second," Eli said, stopping the boy as he turned to leave. Eli unfolded the paper and looked at it. As he took in the contents, his eyes widened in shock. "Where is the woman who gave you this?"

"At the hotel," the boy said, wary of Eli's tone. "She was a settin' on the porch and asked me to take it to ya."

"Is she still there?"

"I think so."

Eli pushed past the boy and hurried down the street.

For a few moments Eddie pushed sheets of paper through the machine. If he followed Eli, Eli would get mad. Then again, Eli was always mad. And he really did want to hear what Eli said to that woman and what the woman said back to Eli. Tearing free his apron strings and tossing the apron onto a chair, Eddie headed for the door.

Out on the street, he could already see Eli standing in front of the porch of the hotel, looking up to where a group of people were seated. His hands were raised so that they were on a level with his head. Eddie ran. When he stopped, a few paces behind Eli, the argument was going full force.

"I made a deal with you, sir. Can't a lady expect a gentleman to honor an agreement?" There was a hapless, almost teary quality to the woman's voice—one that made Eddie want to shout that he would run her advertisement whether Eli would or not.

"He don't sound like no gentleman to me," a voice from the hotel porch called, "going back on his word to a lady."

"As I've explained to you, madam, I did not know the content of your advertisement. Had I known, I would have refused it. It is not something that I can print." Eli's voice was hoarse. "Don't you know the trouble it could cause?" Eddie could almost feel the desperation in his words.

"I'm doing what I have to do," she answered angrily. "I do not have to explain my reasoning to you."

From behind the woman a man of medium height with curly brown hair, dressed like a gambler, appeared. "Excuse me, ma'am. May I be of assistance?"

"Oh, if you could."

Eli looked at the man, a sour twist to his mouth.

"Sir," the gambler began, "I don't know where you come from, but where I come from we don't treat women this way."

"But—" Eli was fuming. The gambler cut him off.

"No buts about it, sir. You made a deal with this woman, and you are bound to honor it. Otherwise, you will answer to me."

"And me," a voice from the back of the porch added. The few men on the porch mumbled agreement. Eli threw up his hands. He turned to leave and spotted Eddie. His face, which was already red, turned a shade darker.

"What are you doing here?" He struck Eddie on the shoulder as Eddie turned to duck the blow.

"You, sir," the woman's voice called out from the porch. Eli was rearing back for another blow when she called out again. "You, Mr. Newspaperman."

Eli turned, his hand still lifted.

"I can see that you are nothing but a bully. Perhaps if you found someone besides boys and women to pick on, you wouldn't find it so sporting."

There were murmurs of approval from the others on the porch.

Eli's hand dropped. "Get back to the office," he said angrily to Eddie.

Eddie looked up at Miss Hopkins, who was looking at him now. She smiled at him. Did she like him?

Eddie ran back to the office, threw on his apron, and started the press before Eli stormed through the door. Eli glared at him a moment, then went to the type bench and began to lay out the advertisement. As sorely tempted as Eddie was to go over and look at what Eli was setting, he kept to his task.

Finally, when it was time to check the ink, he saw it.

Be it known that Jake Boozan abandoned his wife Mary and newborn child and left them to starve. Both mother and child died. This notice published by her sister, Stacey Hopkins.

Eddie stood there in the sunlight coming through the office

A first from the American Indian Heritage Foundation

Great Spirit of the Plains

Sculpture shown approximately actual size of 5½" (13.97 cm) in height.

Individually numbered by hand.

Majestic Limited Edition sculpture showcased in a genuine crystal dome.

The brave Indian Warrior summons the heavens. And with awesome mystical power, a vision of the Great Spirit rises from the rugged rock of a crested butte on the horizon. Transformed into a mighty buffalo—the ultimate symbol of strength and sustenance.

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ddie pitched for the ladder and missed the rail. He fell, grabbed the rung and, flipping over, was tossed feet-first into the hay below.

window, suddenly feeling sorry for that beautiful young woman. Even he had heard of Jake Boozan. It took courage to do what she had done. She obviously loved her sister, for she had surely put herself in danger by putting the truth into print.

"What are you gawking at?" Eli yelled. "The ink's fine. Get to printing."

In the parlor of the hotel a large plant trailed green creepers among the chairs. To Eddie it seemed like a nice place for a woman to sit, and he imagined himself sitting with Miss Stacey. Eli had confirmed what he'd known about Jake Boozan. Boozan was an outlaw. There was a thousand-dollar reward on his head, and he was known to have killed ten men in gunfights. Boozan wasn't the kind of man who would let something like the advertisement they were running lie. Eddie had been picturing Jake coming after Miss Stacey. In each of his imaginings, Eddie had figured out a way to save her. After he saved her, he'd sit in this parlor with her and talk.

As he neared the edge of the front desk he saw Smith, the clerk, staring at him.

"Just set them on the counter, boy. You know."

"Um," Eddie hesitated. "I'm supposed to give one to the lady. It's got her advertisement and all."

"Lady? Now which lady would that be? We have a few here."

"Miss Stacey. She put this here advertisement in." Eddie turned a paper and held it up for Smith to see.

He read it quickly and his mouth fell open. He drew back and looked Eddie in the eye. "She put that in?"

"Yes, sir. Can I take it to her?"

Smith hesitated. "She tell you to bring a copy to her?"

"No," Eddie said. He wasn't much for lying, but as soon as he'd told the truth, he wished he had.

"Then you just leave one here for her, and I'll see she gets it."

Eddie just stood there.

"Well, don't just stand there. You run along."

It was dark when Eddie got back to the dugout, which consisted of a low slant roof over a hole dug in the ground. Eli had found Eddie the place. He didn't want the boy sleeping in his small quarters above the paper—he said there was no room. So Eddie shared the dugout with three miners.

As he went inside a single candle was burning. Sam Elliot and George Waverly were snoring in unison. Lyle Watson was sitting up sewing a pair of jeans. Eddie looked around the room. It had never looked so bare before, nor as dirty. There were no windows, and the smell of the miners' sweat hit his nostrils. Did he smell like that? When was the last time he had had a bath?

"Howdy, boy." Lyle whispered so as not to awaken the others. "Any news?" Lyle couldn't read, and Eddie was in the habit of telling him about the news in the paper.

"Can I ask you a question, first?"

"Sure, boy. Although there ain't that much that I can claim answers to."

"How can a man tell when a lady likes him?"

"You got yourself a lady friend?"

Eddie looked at him, embarrassed. He was glad of the dim light in the dugout. "I wouldn't rightly call her a friend yet."

"Oh," Lyle said. He was a kindly man with broad shoulders and thick arms from swinging a double jack all day in the mine. "Don't have any lady friends my own self for the same reason. It's kinda hard for a man to get a handle on a conversation with a lady."

"So I should talk to her, then?"

"If you kin think of something to say. Who is this lady? Do I know her?"

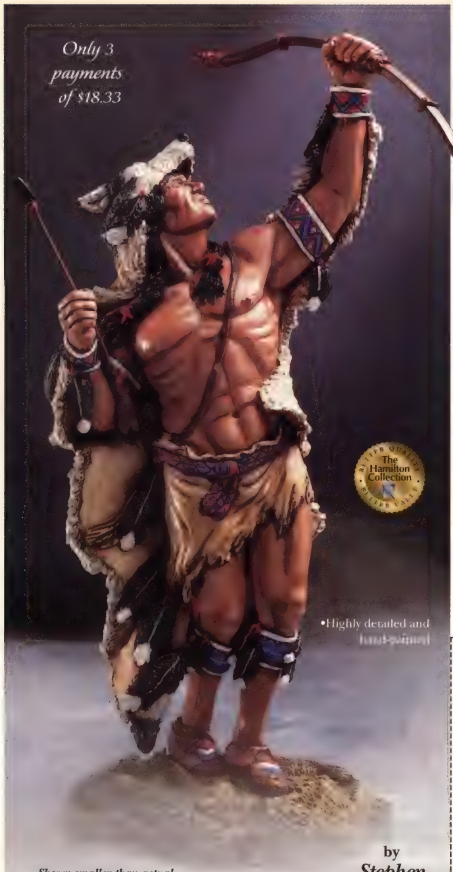
Eddie explained about Stacey and the advertisement that had gotten Eli so upset.

"Whooee!" Lyle exclaimed. He looked at Eddie's face for a long moment, as if considering what to say.

"Heard tell of her. And she's a fine looker." He shook his head and smiled a smile that made Eddie feel a mite uncomfortable.

"I hear tell she has a horse down at the stable she rides every morning. Seems to me, if you were wantin' to talk to her, you'd be there some morning waitin'."

A half hour later, with a promise of a free paper for old Abe, the



Shown smaller than actual size of 9 ¼" in height

by *Stephen Douglas*

SPIRIT OF THE WOLF

Great Spirit, Give me the Strength and Courage of the Wolf

The tribe has gathered on the eve of the hunt, and in the fire's flickering light, unseen spirits are called upon. The proud brave leads the dance dressed in the costume of the wolf. With hands upraised, clutching his arrow and bow, he asks the Great Spirit to give him the courage and cunning of the wolf.

Presenting "Spirit of the Wolf," by Western artist, Stephen Douglas. Vividly lifelike and detailed; absolute in its historic authenticity, this hand-painted sculpture boldly summons the excitement and wonder of this fascinating, age-old ritual—the hunter's sacred dance.

"Spirit of the Wolf" premieres the *Mystic Spirits* Sculpture Collection, sensitively and realistically portraying Native Americans as they strive to achieve a mystic communion with the creatures who share their world. Each exquisite sculpture will be accompanied by a numbered Certificate of Authenticity. And as the owner you will have the opportunity, but never the obligation, to preview subsequent issues. Our 30 Day, **100% Satisfaction Guarantee** assures you order at no risk.

Considering the enormous popularity of Western-theme sculptures, along with the power of Stephen Douglas' art — this series is expected to attract intense demand. Submit your reservation without delay!

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Respond by: October 31, 1995

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made a mistake running that advertisement," Stacey said. "I know it now, and I'm afraid." She looked deeply into Eddie's eyes.

stableman, for the next month, Eddie was bedded down in the loft of the stable.

A female voice drifted into the loft, mixed with a pleasant dream, and woke Eddie. In the dream he had been talking to Miss Stacey. Groggily, he looked down from the loft and wakefulness took him like a bronc throwing a morning toss. It was her, Miss Stacey, standing just below him.

Eddie pitched for the ladder and missed the rail. He fell, grabbed the rung and, flipping over, was tossed feet-first into the hay below. The commotion set the horses in the stall jumping. To his surprise, as he rose, he saw her facing him with a silver pistol, drawn and ready.

"It's just me, Eddie, from the paper," he said as he straightened himself and brushed off the hay. He wasn't hurt, but in terms of his pride, he felt like the hound dog that had cornered a skunk *and* a porcupine in a tight hole.

"Oh," she said. Abruptly the pistol disappeared between folds of an outfit that looked much more expensive than the plain clothes she'd worn the day before when she had visited the office.

"I wondered if you got to see your advertisement. I tried to bring you one, but the clerk wouldn't let me."

"I did get the one you left. That was very kind of you—"

"Eddie."

"Eddie," she said and smiled. "So you're the boy from the paper."

"I'm not a boy. Leastways, I'm almost as old as you."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to insult you. Especially since I need to talk to you."

"To me?" Eddie couldn't hide his surprise.

"Yes. I need to take my horse out right now. Can you have breakfast with me when I come back?"

"I guess. I—"

"Good. I'll be expecting you." She thought a moment. "At the cafe?"

Eddie nodded and watched her ride off.

"That sure is some horse she has." Old Abe was standing a little ways off. Eddie flushed to think he had been there the whole time. "Haven't seen the likes of it in some time. Even the mine owners don't have any that fine."

"Yeah," Eddie said as he rushed out. He had but $1.43 saved up back at the cabin. A hot bath ran twenty-five cents. It was a lot, but he was going to have breakfast with Miss Stacey. She wanted to see him. So he was going to have himself a bath.

The cafe was a room with long tables where miners ate together. It was ten cents a meal, and Eddie intended to pay for both of them. When Eddie came down the street, Miss Stacey was waiting out front.

"Come on," she said, taking his arm. "We need to talk privately. I've arranged a breakfast for us at the hotel."

***

In a small room off the kitchen with a window that overlooked a shaded gulch, they ate alone. A woman brought in eggs, bacon, and coffee. Eddie didn't even want to guess how much it cost. He'd paid a nickel for some eau de toilet after his bath, and he'd bought a clean shirt he'd seen on a clothesline for forty cents. He only had seventy-three cents left and he was afraid that the meal might cost more than that.

Yet, looking into Stacey's brown eyes and having her look back at him and smile, he felt it didn't matter.

She had insisted that they eat before they talked of more private matters. Eddie found he wasn't even hungry in her presence, but he went through the motions of eating.

Before they finished, a shortish man with curly hair, who looked like the gambler who'd stood up for her on the porch, appeared at the door. He said nothing but stared hard at Eddie for a moment and then was gone. Miss Stacey didn't seem to notice him.

When Miss Stacey was done eating she wiped her mouth with a napkin. She smiled at him. "Mr. Roberts—"

Eddie sat there a second before realizing she was addressing him. "You can call me Eddie, ma'am, please."

"Oh, good. Because I'd like to consider you my special friend, Eddie. You see, I need a friend. I'm all alone and a little worried about what might happen when

Suddenly, cold water splashed up over Eddie, drenching him to the bone. He jumped up and faced the door of the outhouse.

Jake Boozan sees my advertisement."

"He's right likely to be mad, ma'am."

"Stacey, please. 'Ma'am' makes me feel old, too." She laughed and Eddie laughed. Dizzying happiness seemed to sweep over him.

"Miss Hopkins—I mean, Stacey—you don't have to worry none about Jake Boozan. I'll protect you."

A hint of a smile appeared on her lips. One Eddie didn't like the look of, for it made him think she was laughing at him, but it vanished quickly. "I wouldn't want that, Eddie. I doubt if you're a match for the man. I think I'll be okay. There aren't many men out here who'll do harm to a woman. The other men won't stand for it. Besides, I need you for something much more important."

"I'll help any way I can," Eddie said.

A maid came back with a coffeepot, filled their cups, and left the pot on the table. As she was clearing the plates away, Eddie said, "I'd like the bill, please."

Stacey waited until the maid had gone before saying, "Do you have that much?"

Eddie flushed with embarrassment. "I've got seventy-three cents."

"If you insist, but it's more than enough that you are going to help me." She leaned closer to him so that her breath was on his face. "I made a mistake running that advertisement. I know it now, and I'm afraid. It was those men on the porch that made me think I was doing right." She paused and looked deeply into his eyes. "Working for the paper, do you hear about things before other people do?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good. Because I was hoping you'd keep an eye out for me. To let me know if the man I wrote the advertisement about shows up around here."

"I can do that, ma'am. If Jake Boozan comes, I'll tell you right away."

"Thank you," she said. She came around the table and bent down as if to kiss him on the forehead. Eddie shied like a young colt and hit the back of his head against the cabinet.

"You don't need to be afraid of me," Stacey said, and to his horror, abandoned the notion of kissing him. She stuck out her hand instead to shake like a man.

"You don't know how much this means to me." And she was gone out the door.

Eddie sat there for a moment thinking about the kiss he had missed, when the maid came back.

"That's eighty-five cents for the breakfast, sir."

Eddie's mouth fell open. "I'm sorry, ma'am," he blushed. "I didn't rightly expect it to be that much. I only have seventy-three cents on me, but I work at the paper and Smith knows me. Could I owe you the rest?"

The maid frowned. "I'll lend you the rest, boy, but you'd better not be doing this again." She took his money and looked as if she was going to say something else, but didn't.

"Yes, ma'am," Eddie said. It was then that he realized he had forgotten to ask Stacey just how he was supposed to contact her. "Do you know where the lady I was with went?"

"No, I don't." She turned to go but stopped by the door and turned back to Eddie. "You might give a thought to listening to what's spoke to you."

The rest of that morning Eddie walked around in a dream—so much so that Eli cuffed him twice for putting type back in the wrong box. But not even the cuffing could take his mind off Miss Stacey.

At lunchtime he wandered over to her hotel and stood outside for a few moments. Two men, gamblers from the way they were dressed, were sitting on the porch. One began to watch him, and it made him feel uncomfortable.

He strolled off toward the hill beside the hotel, wondering where he could go to watch undisturbed. As he looked up, ahead of him, he saw a clothesline strung out behind a small cabin and an idea came to him.

He was standing behind the clothes, watching the hotel, his nostrils filled with the strong scent of soap, when a voice behind him asked, "What are you doing here?"

Eddie turned. The girl was just a bit younger than he was. She had brown hair that peeked out from beneath a white hat and the bluest eyes he had ever seen. "I'm

ance's voice was suddenly stern. "If this has something to do with Miss Hopkins, then I need to know. She may be in danger."

from the paper" was all he could think of to say.

"I know," she said. "I've seen you. You work for Mr. Tobson."

"That's right. He's my uncle."

"But what are you doing hiding among my mother's washing?"

"I really can't say," Eddie said, and then added, "it's reporting business." It wasn't quite a lie, and he hoped it would keep her quiet.

"Oh," she said, and then smiled. She was so thin she was almost boyish looking, but when she smiled she was pretty. "Is it dangerous?" she asked.

"I guess it could be."

"Can I stay with you?"

Eddie didn't want Miss Stacey to see him with a young girl, but if he sent her away, she might get mad. This was her property.

"Okay. But it is important that both of us stay out of sight. And if they do see one of us, it had better be me."

When he had gotten the girl out of sight behind him, Eddie turned to watch the hotel again. But Mary—that's what her name was—tapped him on the shoulder.

"Will there be shootin'?" she asked.

"Don't know. Could be," Eddie whispered.

He had no sooner turned his back than she began tapping him again.

"A lot of shootin'?" she whispered when he looked at her.

"Maybe," he said. He'd no sooner got his eye on the hotel than she was tapping him again. There was no end to her questions. When finally he wouldn't answer her anymore, she made up her own mind about gun-toting thieves out to rob the mines.

There was the sound of a door opening nearby. "Mary. Marreee! Come and help me with the clothes!"

"My mother."

"I'll have to go soon," Eddie whispered. Lunch was almost over and Eddie knew Eli'd throw a fit if he didn't get back. "Can I come back tonight?"

"Sure," Mary said. "But the clothes will be gone. You can hide in the outhouse. Do you have a knife?"

"Yeah."

"You can pick a small hole in the mud Pa put between the cracks and watch the hotel without anyone seeing you."

Eddie smiled at her.

"Just one thing, though."

"What?" Eddie asked, suddenly wary.

"You have to tell me what you're looking for."

"But, I can't."

"Then you can't use our outhouse. Pa is getting really mad about the drunks that sneak in and use it. Messing the place up, he says. If I tell him, he'll chase you like you've never been chased. He's a mite meaner, I imagine, than that Mr. Tobson of yours."

"Can you keep a secret?" Eddie asked. He looked at the small creek meandering through the town to avoid looking at her eyes.

"Of course," Mary said, indignantly.

"It has to do with an outlaw."

"An outlaw?"

"One that's coming to town looking for trouble. Now, that's all I can tell you."

Mary was looking at him, wide-eyed. "Really?"

Eddie nodded.

That afternoon at the paper he didn't fare much better. When he was done with work he hurried over to Mary's.

In the outhouse Eddie sat on the lid covering the holes and with his penknife chipped at the mud between the logs. Within a minute he had a view of the side of the hotel and could see all the way from the front to the back, but it was boring. There was no sign of Miss Stacey and by the time the light faded, Eddie was dozing.

A loud noise woke him.

"I'll teach you to sneak in my privy," an angry voice yelled.

Behind him, another voice pleaded, "Papa, no!"

Suddenly, cold water splashed up over Eddie, drenching him to the bone. He jumped up and faced the door. A tall, thin man dressed in miner's clothing stood there angrily facing him.

Eddie just looked at him, not knowing what to say.

"He's not using the privy," Mary said, which caused the man to turn and look at her. "I mean, not to use it. He's a friend of mine. He's come to court me."

"Court you!" The man turned and stared at Eddie all the harder. He was like a dirt-covered stick. His adam's apple was the only thing that moved, and it

Eddie went to the door and peeked out into the darkness. A small, shadowy figure stood there. He stepped out and shut the door.

seemed to bob up and down. The man's cool eyes took Eddie in. "Well, there's no need for that, boy. She's spoken for."

"Spoken for?" Mary gasped.

"Yes. I was meaning to tell you about it tonight at supper. Now, you get into the house. And you," he added, turning back to Eddie, "had better get off my property before I take a stick to you."

Mary grabbed her father's arm. "What do you mean I'm spoken for, Papa?"

"Get," and with that he laid a hard hand on her seat that lifted her off the ground.

"Hey!" Eddie yelled as the man raised his hand again. He couldn't stand to see a woman mistreated. Without thinking, he reached out and grabbed the man's arm. The man turned and Eddie didn't even see the blow. All he felt was blackness coming over him.

When Eddie woke his head hurt something awful. He was lying in the dirt and someone was helping him up. For a moment he didn't know where he was, and then he saw the side of the hotel looming before him. He was lying in the road at the bottom of the hill from Mary's house.

"How you feelin'?"

Eddie looked up. It was the gambler who had stared at him while he was having breakfast with Miss Stacey—the same one who'd spoken up to Eli when he had wanted to give the woman her money back.

"Fine."

"You sure, boy?" The man's voice was not altogether kind.

"I'm fine," Eddie said. He didn't want this man's help. If it weren't for him, Eli would have talked Stacey out of that advertisement, and she wouldn't be in the fix she was in. "I don't need your help."

"I wouldn't be helping you, but for Miss Hopkins asking me to. She saw you and asked me to come out and see if you were all right."

"Miss Hopkins?" Eddie asked.

"Herself. I'll just go back and tell her you don't need none of her help."

"No. I mean, tell her I'm all right. And grateful. And I'm grateful to you, too, sir. I didn't mean to seem ungrateful."

"I can understand. Did they rob you?"

"No, sir. I wasn't robbed."

"Then what, boy?" The man's voice was suddenly stern. "If this has something to do with Miss Hopkins, then I need to know. The lady may be in danger."

"If it wasn't for you insisting that Eli put that advertisement in, she wouldn't be," Eddie said angrily.

The man looked at him a long moment. "You've got sand, boy, and I like that. I'll admit to my mistake. It was a fool thing to do. But it's done now, and there is no undoing it. So tell me," he said, gently now, "did this have something to do with Miss Hopkins?"

"No."

"Don't lie to me, boy. You're saying someone just beat you up for the heck of it?"

Eddie was scared. This man, for some reason, was very keenly interested in Miss Stacey and her affairs. It seemed that telling him the truth would do no harm.

"A girl's father beat me. He didn't want me seeing her."

"What girl?"

Eddie was tempted to tell the man to mind his own business, but he looked right mad, and one beating was enough for the night. "Right up there on the hill," he said, pointing. "Her name's Mary. Her father works at one of the mines."

The gambler looked at him a long moment, then looked off again as if absorbed in his own deep thoughts. "Come on. Miss Stacey'd want me to take you to the barbershop and get those cuts taken care of."

"Cuts?"

"You should see yourself, boy. Those cuts look bad. We can't have you getting bad sick, now, can we?"

On the way back to the dugout Eddie was feeling elated because Stacey had sent Dance out to check on him. She not only liked him, but had been thinking of him.

In the dugout, all three of the other men were sleeping. Eddie was glad. He didn't need any comments about his face or questions about who had beat on him.

Eddie had just settled down into his bed when the door burst open. A lantern was held up high and light spilled into the room.

It stunned Eddie that Miss Stacey had been married when she had had breakfast with him. He felt a hard lump in his throat.

His eyes adjusted to the darkness, Eddie blinked in the light.

"Just drop the shotgun!" George's voice boomed. "Hartley, I've got a gun trained on your gut, and I can put a few holes in you before you can even swing that shotgun around."

There was the distinctive sound of a gun being cocked in the small room.

Eddie's eyes adjusted to the light. Slowly, the man by the door lowered the shotgun to the floor.

"I want my Mary," Tom Hartley said, his voice filled with both torment and anger. "She's gone and I know that boy who was hiding out in our outhouse knows where she is."

"She's missing?" Eddie asked.

Tom Hartley turned and looked at him. "You know where she is?"

"No, sir."

"You know anything about her being missing, Eddie?"

"No, sir."

"Well, she ain't here," George said. He rose from his bed, the gun still pointed at Hartley. "And Eddie ain't no liar. So you back up."

Hartley stepped back.

"I find out you're lying, boy, I'll beat you worse than I did before!" Tom Hartley yelled.

"You beat this boy?" George demanded.

"He was at my place, talking sassy, and got in my way. He was bothering my Mary."

"Bothering her!" Eddie yelled. "You were hitting her. I only—"

"Eddie, shut your mouth," George roared. "Tom, I can understand you being upset with your daughter missing," George said as he picked up the shotgun, broke it open, and took out the shells. "But your daughter ain't here, ain't been here, and Eddie don't know anything about where she is. You take your gun and get. You want to look for her, you look for her. But you won't find her staying here."

Without another word, Tom Hartley turned and left. As George shut the door behind him, the dugout was plunged into darkness. Eddie was expecting George to say something. But George only went back to his bed. After a moment, Eddie did the same.

"'Night, George. Thanks," Eddie said.

"'Night, boy" was all George said.

Eddie had been tossing and turning for what seemed like hours when there came a soft tapping at the dugout door. The other men were asleep—they had been snoring for some time. It was so soft at first that Eddie thought it was just the stirring of a rat. Then it came again. It had to be after midnight. Eddie was half afraid it was Tom again. He lay frozen in his bed when a girl's voice called outside the door, softly, "Eddie—Eddie, it's me."

Eddie went to the door and peeked out into the darkness. A small, shadowy figure stood there.

"It's me, Mary. Can I come in?" she whispered.

Instead of letting her in, Eddie stepped out, pulling the door closed behind him.

"Why did you come here?" Eddie asked. He realized his voice sounded edgy. What would Stacey think of him had she heard him speak that way to a girl who had come to him for help?

"I ran away. I have no place to go. I thought you might help me."

"Well, you can't stay here." Eddie thought for a moment. "But maybe you can stay at the newspaper office."

Eli, Eddie explained on the way, slept above the office. But as he had his own key, he could let her in, and she could sleep on the couch Eli kept there for visitors.

"Will he mind my being there?" she asked.

"I don't think we should wake him. I'll tell him tomorrow," Eddie said. The truth was that Eddie was sure that if Eli knew he would send the girl home. Human kindness didn't seem to take up much room in Uncle Eli's war bag.

Eddie opened the door quietly and pulled it closed behind him. "We'd better not turn on the light. The couch is over there." He pointed to it. "I hope the smell don't get to you."

"I like the smell."

Eddie just looked at her in the dim moonlight coming through the window.

"I'm really grateful," she said. "If there's anything I can do for you. . . ."

"Ain't no need."

"You know I work at the hotel. I help my mother with the laun-

ddie decided that Stacey must be scared to tell her husband about the gambler. It was the only thing that made sense.

dry. If there's ever anyone you need to know about."

"You work at the hotel?"

"I just said that."

"Do you know Miss Stacey?"

"Her?" There was real surprise in her voice. "Is she the one you were watching for?" Her disdain was so plain that Eddie was taken aback.

"What's wrong with her?" Eddie blurted out, immediately sorry for the way he had spoken to her and for talking so loudly. He just hoped he hadn't awakened Eli.

Sensing his strong feelings, Mary waited a moment. "Nothing. I'm sure that now she's married, she'll be a fine lady."

"Married?"

"She was married day before yesterday to Tom Bridger, the mine owner."

Eddie was dumbfounded. He stood staring at her.

"Didn't you know?"

"No. I—" Eddie said, his shock apparent in his voice.

"You're sweet on her," she said, her voice full of anger and triumph.

Eddie looked down, embarrassed.

"Well, I can tell you, there's not much to like."

"Why would you say a thing like that?" Eddie said angrily, thinking she was just jealous.

"That man she married—Tom Bridger? I don't think she really even cares for him. All the while Bridger was courting her she was carrying on with a gambler behind his back. Don't look at me that way. I've seen them together. And I know he's been in her room at night."

"A short man, with curly brown hair?"

"That's the one. They call him Dance."

"Just because they're friends doesn't mean she isn't a lady."

"He was alone with her in her room."

Eddie thought a moment and then smiled. "I'm alone with you."

She looked at him angrily. "Then maybe you'd better leave."

Eddie turned and walked out of the office, glad to be away from her.

It stunned Eddie that Miss Stacey had been married when she had had breakfast with him. He felt something like a hard lump in his throat. That was probably why the maid at the hotel had carried on so. He had been eating alone with the new Mrs. Bridger. Now he had to see her. If she had married Tom Bridger, then she'd be at his house at the top of the hill, so that's where Eddie headed. It was probably too late for her to be up, but at the moment Eddie didn't care.

By the time he'd climbed to the large two-story cabin Bridger had built for himself back in among the trees, Eddie had changed his mind. It was too late to be calling on her, even if he did know what he'd say. Unlike Eddie's dugout, the cabin was built off the ground and had a large porch out front. The scent of pine sap hung heavy in the air. Eddie stood looking at it in the moonlight, feeling sorry for himself. He was about to leave when a light went on in the front room.

Spying into windows wasn't something a decent man did, but Eddie couldn't help himself. He had to at least get a glimpse of her if he could. He worked his way around the place through the trees and slowly crept up to the side of the cabin. The window would have been too high up for Eddie to peer into, if it hadn't been for a woodpile along the side. Eddie climbed it, wondering who would be up at this hour?

Cautiously, standing at the top of the pile, Eddie eased himself against the side of the cabin and peered into the corner of the partly open window.

That gambler, Dance, and Stacey were standing together, alone in the room. Dance had Mrs. Bridger in his arms and, as Eddie watched, pulled her toward him and kissed her full on the lips. She pushed him away. "Now go, before you wake Tom," she said.

Eddie was furious. The gambler was forcing his attentions on a decent married woman. Barely thinking, he stooped to grab a log for a weapon. As he pulled one loose the others shifted. He slipped, slid off the pile of logs, landed hard, and rolled under the house.

"What was that?" he heard Dance ask above him.

"Tom—go!"

There was the sound of boots across the floor above him and a door closing. Moments later something, or someone, moved off into

t first the mine guard wouldn't let Eddie in, but when he told the man that Bridger's wife had sent him, he was ushered through.

the woods. Then there was silence. Eddie tried to get up, but the effort sent a piercing pain through his back. For the moment, he couldn't move.

"Darling?" he heard a man call out. It had to be her husband. He would know what to do about the gambler, Eddie thought.

"Here, Tom, dear. I heard something and thought a raccoon had gotten into the house," Stacey lied calmly.

Eddie was shocked. Wasn't she going to tell him about what had just happened?

By the time Eddie sneaked away, he had decided that Stacey was scared to tell her husband about the gambler. It was the only thing that made sense. He knew that Miss Stacey couldn't be like Mary said. Perhaps something had happened in her past that the gambler knew about and she was afraid to tell her husband. Maybe it was something he could do something about. And he would, Eddie decided. Even if he had to face Dance with a gun himself.

At daybreak the air was as cold as a mountain stream. Eddie put on a coat and hurried from the dugout to the newspaper office. He had to waken Mary and figure out what to do with her before Eli discovered her. He turned the key and pushed the door gently, but as was often the case in the cold of early morning, the door didn't budge. Carefully, he put ever-increasing pressure on it. Suddenly, with a crack like a .45, the door swung wide. The knob pulled free from his hand and the door hit the wall. One of the panes of glass shattered and fell in a tinkling crash to the floor.

For a moment there was silence. Then Eli's voice roared from above, "What's going on down there?"

"Nothing," Eddie called weakly.

Mary jumped up from the couch. Her clothes were wrinkled and her eyes looked sleepy.

Heavy footsteps above told him Eli was on his way. He wanted to tell Mary to go, but where could she go?

"What's all this noise?" Eli yelled in outrage as he came into the room.

Eddie closed the door. "I'm sorry. It was stuck, and I broke it trying to get it open."

"At daybreak?" Eli's face was red.

"I'm sorry," Mary said. "It was my fault."

Eli turned to her and was just about to say something when there was a sound behind Eddie.

Eddie turned. A tall, dark-looking man in dusty clothes stood in the doorway with a .45 leveled at Eli.

"Who put that lying advertisement in your paper about me?" Jake Boozan asked.

For a moment all was still in the room. The gun in the man's hand was pointed at Eli, but Eddie felt a chill run through him.

"It wasn't my idea," Eli said shakily. "A woman gave it to me, and a gambler made me print it."

"Where's the woman?"

"You can shoot me, but I won't tell you."

Boozan stared at Eli. Eddie was sure the gun in his hand would spout fire at any moment. Boozan looked mad enough to kill. Still, the gunman simply said, "You got sand. I'll just ask around." He holstered his revolver, turned, and walked out the door.

Eddie looked at Eli with sudden admiration. Then without another word, he ran out the door. Boozan would find out where Miss Stacey was. Eddie had to warn her, and he had precious little time.

Moments after he began pounding on her door, Miss Stacey answered it. "He's here in town?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. He's asking around about you, trying to find you."

She didn't look as upset as Eddie had imagined she'd be. Her expression was so calm Eddie could barely believe it. "My husband isn't here. He went to his mine. Can you get him for me?"

"Maybe you should get out. Hide. Boozan is going to find out soon enough you're here."

"No," she said. Then, as if responding to the panic in Eddie's expression, she said softly, "I don't think he'll hurt a woman. And my husband can deal with him."

Was her husband really good enough to go against Jake Boozan? Then why hadn't she told him about the gambler who was bothering her? He was trying to

think of the right way to ask her when she said, "Please, hurry! But make sure he comes alone."

"Alone, ma'am? Boozan's a killer."

"Surely, Eddie, you must understand that this is a private matter. If I didn't know my husband could handle this, I wouldn't ask it. Will you get him for me now, please?"

"Yes, ma'am."

On the way to the mine it bothered Eddie that she didn't want her husband to bring help. Was her husband really that good with a gun? What if she was wrong?

At first the mine guard wouldn't let him in, but when he told the man that Bridger's wife had sent him, Eddie was ushered through. Bridger was a short, fat man with reddish hair. As Bridger struggled to put on his gun belt, Eddie realized he was not at all the type of man that Eddie would have pictured Miss Stacey marrying. In twenty minutes they were back at the cabin. They walked around the house before going inside. There was no horse to be seen.

As they stepped in the door, a deep voice said, "Well, now. This lady tells me I'm to take it up with you if I found offense with her lies about me in the paper."

Taking in the scene in that room, what Eddie noticed was Miss Stacey's face. She didn't look shocked or worried. She looked almost pleased.

Tom Bridger looked at Boozan and Eddie could tell from the expression on his face that he knew what he was facing. Still, he was a man, and he reached for his gun.

Without thinking, Eddie jumped. He grabbed Bridger around the waist and threw him down as a bullet burned his own back. Bridger landed hard, and his gun, barely out of the holster, went skittering across the floor.

Boozan stood with his gun pointing. "Pick that gun back up."

"Was that a lie the paper printed about you?" Eddie asked.

The outlaw looked at Eddie. "Damn right, boy. I never married no woman, so I sure never left any. Didn't know no decent woman who'd have me, and if I found me one I sure wouldn't give her up. But that advertisement sure has made a stir and a ruckus. It's not something a man can just let go."

Eddie sensed that Boozan was telling the truth. "But this man had nothing to do with it," Eddie said. "And I aim to fix it."

Boozan was angry, but he was intelligent as gunmen go. Killing this man might square things, but it wouldn't fix them. "Just how you planning on doing that?" he asked carefully.

There was only one way both Boozan and Miss Stacey could be telling the truth. "We'll run another advertisement, telling the

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truth. That the man who married Mrs. Bridger's sister just said he was you."

"That's a lie," Stacey shouted. "I was there at the wedding. He's the one married my sister, and he let her and his baby die. If you're a man, Tom, you'll kill him!"

It was then that Eddie saw that Stacey had her small gun in her hand. She was pointing it not at Boozan, but at Bridger and him. Eddie wasn't surprised as much as sorry.

"That's a downright lie," Boozan yelled, turning toward her. "I've never harmed a woman. You've no call to say that."

Bridger, seeing Boozan distracted, jumped for his gun. Eddie, knowing he couldn't reach the gun first, jumped on Bridger again.

Bridger stopped as the gunman leveled the .45 at his head.

"Boozan's telling the truth, sir! Your wife just wants to get you killed. I think she and a gambler named Dance planned the whole thing. I seen him kissing her right here in this house, last night."

"Why, you," Stacey cried out. Boozan moved. As the outlaw grabbed her gun, Stacey Bridger fired again and again. Boozan slumped to the floor. Eddie jumped and in a moment had Bridger's gun leveled at Miss Stacey, just as she knelt to retrieve her gun from the dead gunman's hands. Stacey Bridger looked at Eddie, then at the dead body of Boozan, and then at Bridger. Without another word, she walked quickly out the door.

Stacey and the gambler, Dance, were never seen again. Eli found out her real name was Kat Ballinger. She and Dance, whose real name was Danville Tibbs Smart, were legally married so there was no need to worry about them coming back, killing Bridger, and trying to claim any inheritance. The two were wanted for a number of swindles and the shooting of a rancher from Red Gulch over a horse.

Eli returned Mary to her parents. She had changed her mind and decided to marry the man her father had promised her to. He had just found gold when he had asked her father for her hand. Mary and her new husband sold their mine and moved back East. Bridger insisted that Eddie get the reward for Boozan. Eli insisted he use it to go to school, though he let Eddie pick out the school. Eddie did. He passed on the new state university in Missoula, since it allowed women, and chose an all men's college in Chicago. ⊞

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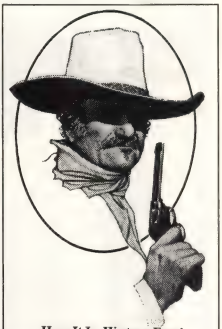

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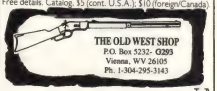

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THE

Great River Bend Ranch Ripoff

by Riley Froh

"We ain't stealin' no horses, and that's final," I said for the tenth time.

"You ain't listenin'," Abner countered. "We ain't stealin' 'em. We're borrowin' 'em."

"Yeah, you can *say* that, but the people won't *know* that. We get caught stealin' cattle, all we get is the pen. We get caught with somebody else's horses, people are goin' to be lookin' for ropes."

"Well, we'll talk about it later. Right now, you're up."

We were at the Texas High School Rodeo Finals in that magic spring of 1936. Abner Butler, my best friend and our preacher's son, stood in third place in the bull riding, whereas I ranked tenth–right under the wire to be in the running. Abner had made it on talent, while I had arrived at the championship run out of fear–the nameless, unreasoning terror of being maimed or killed riding one of those monsters. Peer pressure had put me into this situation, but common sense and intuition were about to release me.

I had devised a plan based on my intense inner feeling that if I rode one more time, it would be my last. I planned to bail off that brute early.

Spectators can't really tell how obscene this phase of rodeo is from their seats in the stands. But when you're crouched on top of the chute, trying to ease down on flesh and bone and trouble, your perspective is changed mightily. The abnormal heat radiating from the body of the aroused bull ought to tell you something.

Abner had drawn Slop Jar, the meanest bull in the circuit. I scrambled up over the complicated woodwork to help him rig up.

But Abner had me on the back of the hump now, and I nodded my head at the judge to turn the bull out. Then my hands worked the fastest they have ever moved. When the gate swung open, I hung on to it. My bovine partner in this strange rite of passage plunged out into the arena without me.

The laughter in the stands erupted spontaneously. The announcer rolled a couple of phrases off his glib tongue at my expense, which gave rise to even more guffaws, cat calls, and insults from the audience. To this day in my neck of the woods, I have not lived this incident of my youth down, but the way I figure it is that the alternative was the silent grave, so I have still come out ahead. But it wasn't funny then.

I forced myself to look at Abner on his perch back up on the chute. As usual, he shook his head in knowing yet understanding disapproval.

But he had his own concerns, if he had been normal enough to worry about them. He had drawn Slop Jar, the meanest bull in the circuit. I scrambled up over the complicated woodwork to help him rig up.

"You just set a record," he gently mocked. "That's the shortest ride anybody's ever made in these parts."

"Yeah, and you'd do well to get off this boy," I pointed out. "You know his reputation."

"He's goin' to help me win the championship," Abner grinned easily.

He caught the judge looking the other way, made a quick, illegal suicide wrap around his hand, and nodded to the gate man before anybody could stop him. Slop Jar surged out in a great leaping arch, bounded straight up, and turned his landing into a powerful spin. Abner was *riding* him, not just staying on; he had found his rhythm. Even when Slop Jar launched into his famous twisting whirl, Abner stayed with him, and the crowd was into it with the rider. It was beautiful in all its terrifying aspects. But Abner couldn't resist flashing his famous grin to the stands and waving his hat. The lost concentration was his downfall and the next pitch and toss swung him under the bull's midsection, where he slung loose from his tie between the plunging hooves. The points of the stomping feet scraped him but did not crush him. I stifled a scream as I watched Abner, grinning as though he was enjoying a carnival ride. He scrambled, crawled, and stumbled to his feet, running for the fence, but he would never have made it had the rodeo clown not sailed his hat right by the bull's nose. The distraction gave Abner the split second he needed to get to safety. Not that it mattered, for Abner swung around back into the arena where he outclowned the clown by dodging the enraged Slop Jar. He was banned from competition for a year for his antics, but he always loved to put on a good show, no matter what the cost. Most of the crowd enjoyed it, too.

So there we were. I was disgraced; Abner, disqualified. The amazing thing was that we were there in the first place. The Reverend Dr. Andrew Butler did not hold with gambling. Rodeo was a game of chance, he maintained. However, Mr. Snodgrass, our ag teacher and a deacon in the church, convinced Brother Butler that the sport was an exercise in skill with rewards going to the best contestant and that the competition built character. The entry fee just kept the organization running. Our preacher bought this foolishness mainly because he wanted to believe Mr. Snodgrass's other weak argument—that it would keep Abner out of trouble. He should have known what I knew. Nothing would keep Abner out of trouble. He had that enormous capacity for sin that some preachers' kids just seem naturally born with.

We rode out of the fairgrounds that afternoon in total ignominy. And we were busted financially. Abner had made a good run on his calf, but his horse had broken the barrier. The penalty had cost him the title. My loop had been formed too large and the calf ran clear though it, except for his back foot. That kind of catch will always take too long to throw and tie. In the bulldogging, Abner's steer stopped short, causing Abner to eat a mouthful of dirt in front of his crafty target. Mine fell on his wrong side, and by the time I got him up and thrown correctly, I had set the longest time of the afternoon.

As a final insult, Tammy Fay Snodgrass and Alta June Semple giggled and tittered at us from the backs of their winning barrel-racing horses as we passed by on our way out the gate. I couldn't even

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"All we gotta do is drive Hiram Benedict's heifers to the river, swim 'em across, and we pick up a hundred dollars," Abner said.

enjoy the sight of the jiggling and shaking that their convulsions brought to their top-heavy torsos. Tammy Fay's remark about a chicken and a banty rooster stung pretty good.

We took the scenic way home, mainly for therapy, and because we just liked to ride. Not that Abner was ever down for long, as I was. His criminal tendencies usually got his mind off failures in a hurry.

Although it was pleasant in the late evening, something cool to drink was on our minds. Jive music reached our ears from a beer joint set back from the road under the shade of enormous trees. We could see the crowd outside, playing dominoes and tilting the dark beer bottles back as they drank.

"I need some medicine," Abner said, indicating with his eyes the dark stains beginning to show through his shirt where the bull had scratched and battered him.

"I could use a drink," I said truthfully, "but we ain't got no money. Everything we had, including our emergency fund, went into that rodeo."

"Speak for yourself," Abner grinned, pulling some bills out of his shirt pocket.

Then I remembered that Abner had volunteered to work the concession stand during the girls' goat roping. He was already trotting his horse across the way to Nat's Club. Although we were underage, we could usually get some poor citizen to buy us a jug or a bottle of beer, providing, of course, that we bought him the same amount he picked up for us.

We kept our horses back in the trees so that Nat could at least play like he didn't know what was going on (he didn't want to give any redneck deputy an excuse to crack his head). He sent us a silent message, though, by including a free church key in our sack to pop the caps off the beer.

Soon we were swinging down the lane again with the Lone Star bottles clicking reassuringly in our saddlebags. And as the beer went down, my spirits rose. Ordinarily, we preferred whiskey but beer went just as well on a lazy afternoon such as that Saturday, with the warmth of spring upon us.

Shortly, we moved into a grown-over area of the landscape, a lonely section where wild grapevines formed umbrellas over the post oaks they enveloped, with their streamers trailing back down to the fallen fences and stumps of trees killed from their close embrace. Hundreds of bees droned, birds shot through the few openings in the foliage in their endless chase after elusive insects, and butterflies fluttered from flower to flower. Somewhere within the thickest density, a woodpecker beat his brains out in syncopated rhythm. All this natural splendor was free, and what's more, we appreciated it. Abner and I knew we lived in the best of times, and we made the most of them. Emerson called that genius.

Abruptly, we passed out of the thicket into a patch of field stretching back to the tree-covered hills on the horizon. I sensed that Abner was about to pontificate on his favorite subject—getting something for nothing.

"We got to get serious," he said, which I knew to mean he wanted to steal something. "It's just as well that I'm disqualified and you're sidelined from rodeo temporarily. There ain't no money in it no way, else we'd be rich instead of broke. If you'll listen to me, we can get our money back and then some."

He knew he had me because he knew I was down. I knew he had me because I was listening to him. I had a susceptibility to criminal activity when Abner made it seem harmless and attractive.

"Hiram Benedict has a small herd of registered Black Angus cattle he keeps right up there by the main ranch house," Abner began. "There's two bred heifers in that little pen right there against the barn. And what's even better, them good saddle horses—that we're borrowin', you understand, not stealin'—are right on the other side. All we gotta do is drive 'em to the river, swim 'em across to the Jennings place, and we pick up a hundred dollars cash money. Old man Jennings is gonna truck 'em to his other place in the sand hills, right the other side of the Iron Mountains."

"But that ain't all we gotta do," I insisted, weakening greatly toward the scheme. Remember, this was 1936. Hamburgers were a nickel apiece, six for a quarter. A hundred dollars cash money was a small fortune. It was definitely wrong, but it *was* tempting.

"Right," he added. "We'll take the horses and saddles back to the barn where we got 'em."

Hiram Benedict owned several miles of land on both sides of the

New device turns any electrical outlet into a phone jack

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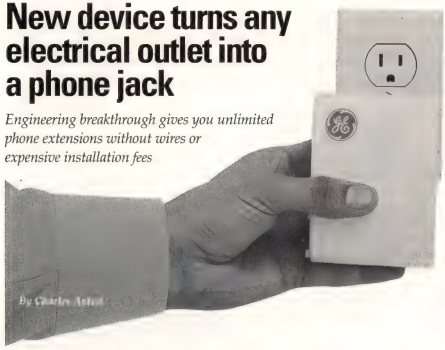

By Charles Artzt

You don't have to have a teenager to appreciate having extra phone jacks. Almost everyone wishes they had more phone jacks around the house.

When I decided to put an office in my home, I called the phone company to find out how much it would cost to add extra phone jacks. Would you believe it was $158?

No more excuses. Today, there are a thousand reasons to get an extra phone jack and a thousand excuses not to get one. Now an engineering breakthrough allows you to add a jack anywhere you have an electrical outlet. Without the hassle. Without the expense. And without the miles of wires.

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Special factory-direct offer. To introduce this new technology, we are offering a special factory-direct package. For a limited time, the transmitter is only $49. One transmitter works an unlimited number of receivers priced at $49 for the first one and $39 for each additional receiver. Plus, with any Wireless Phone Jack purchase, we'll throw in a phone card with 30 minutes of long distance (a $30 value) for only $9.95!

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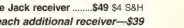

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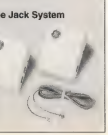


It was easy to pretend we were in the world the Saturday matinee pictured, but Abner's games could actually have gotten us killed.

beautiful and scenic San Marcos River, except for a little sliver of property known as the Jennings place, which lay right across from the great bend in the watercourse. Benedict had begged, bullied, threatened, cajoled, and otherwise pressured old man Jennings to sell out for years. (He didn't want to own all the land in Texas; he just wanted his and the property right next to him.) Jennings had resisted and a running feud had ensued. Tobe Jennings probably wouldn't have stolen from anyone else; he looked at taking from Benedict as a part of getting even. By contrast, Abner would steal from anyone. He was what you would call today an equal opportunity exploiter.

But it was easy to rationalize stealing from Benedict. His parsimony was classic. He was so stingy and close-fisted that he only grudgingly gave to the Methodist Church where he was a trustee when his donation—such as a new wing on the old building or a brand new crate of songbooks—would be seen by all. Sordidly avaricious, he carried frugality to the extreme. It was said that he kept two sets of scales for his cotton transactions—one used to sell; the other, to buy.

Realizing I was being dragged into another one of Abner's impossible schemes, I saw an argument to kill the whole enterprise. My opposition usually stressed that the design contained a fatal flaw.

"We'll never get past the guard dogs and the fence riders," I cleverly pointed out.

"That's why we're borrowin' the horses," Abner replied with his usual vigor and vision. "See, we're gonna float in on a rowboat. Then Jennings can carry us back to our horses at the hideout in his truck."

Foolishly, I reached back into the saddlebags, realized that I was holding the last beer, came to terms in my mind with how broke we were, and voted for the project. Besides, we were due for a lucky hit, for our last two robberies had struck out.

"Next weekend, Daddy's taking the entire church leadership inside the sanctuary for constant prayer for rain," he said. "They plan to stay for the duration, so that puts your folks and mine out of the way for a while. We'll stay with Grandma Butler, of course, so that gives us time to make our big score."

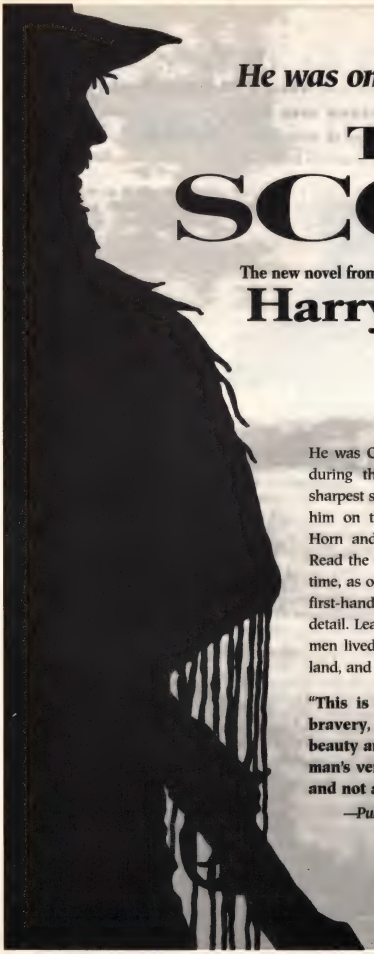
Abner's grandmother represented quite a distinguished family. A descendant of the rugged pioneer Baptist preachers of frontier Texas, a daughter of one of the best-known turn-of-the-century evangelists, she was the mother of the most prominent minister of the area and the grandma of the greatest incipient rascal in the entire Southwest, namely Abner Butler.

Grandma Butler dutifully drank the dram of wine her doctor prescribed before bedtime for medicinal purposes, although this was done in secret, for she subscribed to the teetotaler philosophy of our stern faith. Abner had taken to spiking her grape, so the dear lady would be out from dark till dawn. Moreover, after her drug-induced slumbers, she would invariably testify that we had listened to our radio programs before spending a quiet night in her home.

A week of school came and went. When Friday night arrived, Abner ensured his grandmother's long slumber and we rode out on another of our adventures together. We logged a lot of miles side by side on horseback during our boyhood, but the night rides were magic. With the shadows falling around us it was easier to pretend that we were really in the world that the Saturday afternoon matinee pictured—in a West that was free and that must have existed somewhere in time. But the truth of it all was that Abner's midnight games could actually have gotten us killed.

We struck the Southern Pacific tracks and followed them to the San Marcos River bridge. Here we left our horses where the railroad penned its scraper mules. Downriver, the local rustics kept their fishing boats chained to a stand of elms. One in particular had a rusty lock which was a fake—the links of chain were baling-wired on the other side of the tree, which would fool most honest folks, but not Abner.

Soon we were drifting with the current into the vast domain of Hiram Benedict. If our horseback ride that night was magic, the boat trip was mystical. Tree frogs squeaked from the reeds to the tops of the highest limbs, and the flitting bats feeding silently on them made no dent in their noise. Moonbeams transformed the steam into a ribbon of light between the high bank on the south and the low sandbars on the



He was one with the West.

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—*Publishers Weekly* (Starred review)

Delacorte Press

It was rumored that Benedict had hidden his coins on the ranch when Roosevelt had called in the gold reserves.

north. Great pecan trees loomed white-trunked in the moonlight behind the enormous cypresses and willows along the waterway. Bullfrogs boomed their locations while night birds fed in the shallows. So ghostly was our movement that many creatures only stared rather than run away as we glided by—even three deer, who barely stopped drinking long enough to take notice of us.

At last we eased up to a low spot where Benedict's cattle drank. A beaten cow path cut a trail up out of the river bottom toward the high ground and the ranch headquarters.

As we emerged from the dense growth along the river, we noticed a flickering of lightning playing in a circle around us on the far horizon. A sudden cooler wind touched our faces.

"It's gonna rain," I stated ominously.

" 'The fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' " Abner quoted the familiar lines regarding prayer and rainfall from the book of James in perfect imitation of his father's pronouncements from the pulpit.

I wished he wouldn't turn scripture into blasphemy, especially at this particular time, but I knew better than to caution him—it would only set him off into more sacrilege. Fortunately, he began to mimic Roosevelt's "Rendezvous with Destiny" speech in the perfect cadence of the blue-blooded New Yorker, and that set him to spouting his favorite tales about the supposed real reasons for Eleanor's trips to the South, as discussed in Westbrook Pegler's newspaper columns. I know that you're supposed to be quiet during criminal activity, but Abner was Abner and there was no stopping him.

We jingle-jangled up to the barn in our boots and spurs, intent on being back on horseback soon anyway. The house dogs set to yapping and running toward us as soon as we reached the perimeter of the pens. I was just as glad because I wanted out by then anyway.

"Hold still and let me calm these dogs," Abner ordered.

I flattened myself against a big corner post and tried to look invisible in the semidarkness. Sure enough, the dogs did know my friend. In no time they were crowding around him like it was old home week. Then they nosed me out.

"I done been up here before on a couple of scoutin' expeditions," Abner explained to my unspoken question. "These fellows know me pretty good."

Indeed they did and they trusted me by that time, as well. I knew that there were times that Abner prowled nocturnally on his own, although he usually had me by his side. This was another dimension of Abner that concerned me. Normally, someone his age should be afraid to roam the countryside alone during the midnight hours. I suspected that he traveled with Lucifer himself during his wild, lonesome excursions. Curiously and unnervingly, I often felt a strange, eerie presence lurking nearby on some of our criminal outings, although I never really detected anything solid, or ever even smelled brimstone.

In the distance on the wide front porch, the tall, angular, erect, humorless form of Hiram Benedict emerged from his front door, a lantern in his hand. Even from my perspective many yards away, I could sense that he had probably been counting his pennies from that very day into a fruit jar, which he would eventually bury. It was rumored, probably correctly, that he had illegally hidden his gold coins on the ranch when Roosevelt had called in the gold reserves from private citizens.

"What is it, Hiram?" came a whiny voice from inside the house.

"Probably a skunk," he answered shortly. "Here, boys, what is it?" he yelled at his dogs.

Fortunately for us, enough of his pack of curs returned to his circle of light to put Benedict's suspicions to rest. Abner was already in the horse pens, saddling up like he owned the place, oblivious to the danger. I followed suit, but I was breathing heavily. The activity of fooling with two of the best quarter horses in the country took my mind off the folly of our enterprise.

"If we rode two animals like this, we'd win some money at rodeo," I said before I thought.

"We could change our minds and try to keep 'em," Abner said thoughtfully, immediately interested.

"No, no!" I cried, alarmed. "We ain't stealin' no horses."

Before Abner could reply, a beam of headlights cut across the lot as a car drove up in the dis-

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Benedict threw down a roll of bills in front of Beatty, scooped up the case of whiskey, and stomped off toward his house.

tance, once again setting off the dogs. Abner was hightailing it for the barn, and I nearly beat him there in my fright. We wedged ourselves behind some hay bales against the north wall.

Up at the house we heard the screen door slam and Benedict yelled back at his wife that the visitor was on business about a mule. One set of steps crunched from the parked car, while Benedict's firm and determined tread followed his circle of lantern light toward our makeshift hideout. Why, when you are hiding from someone in their barn, they will come and stand right by your place of concealment when there is so much other space in which to congregate, I'll never know, but such is the irony of life. It also follows that you can case out a job all you want to, find that the target is never occupied at a particular hour, only to arrive for the robbery to find the whole town population, including the dogs, unexpectedly there on that one occasion. Try it yourself and you will see what I mean.

During the conversation that followed, it was easy to picture the other party, for we had dealt with Boyd Beatty, a major area bootlegger, enough ourselves in our short lives to recognize that unpleasant voice in anybody's barn. Benedict, a pillar of the local Methodist church, got his whiskey the same way Abner and I did—on the sly. But according to Abner's father, the Reverend Dr. Andrew Butler, such were the ways of all Methodists, since any group that chose sprinkling over total immersion were hardly followers of the faith in the first place.

"Well, where is it?" Benedict demanded in his usual peremptory tone. "I ordered a fifth of blended whiskey."

"I got a case in the car," Beatty snorted. "Let's make a trade for the whole hog."

"I'll have to have a discount," Benedict demanded.

"You'll have to pay more," Beatty insisted.

"In that case, see how quick you can get off my property," Benedict shot back.

"All right," Beatty gave in—too quickly, I thought. "Two bits off each bottle."

"Four bits," Benedict squeezed out, for his lips were involuntarily compressing tightly.

"Done," said Beatty.

"I'll go get the cash," simpered Benedict.

But Benedict was no sooner out of the barn than a stranger slunk in with a case of whiskey. The new man we did not know. He had the mean look of a killer. A deep scar ran across his left eye and down his dirty cheek. He had that look of having been deprived of necessities at a formative period of his life and he bore the marks of having done hard time.

"Now, Junior, make this look good," Beatty said. "When that old tightwad comes back, step out and hold us both up. Lock us both in that root cellar. Then tear up that house if you have to, but find that cash. That old fool has a fortune hidden on this ranch."

You really do break into a cold sweat when you get involved in these kinds of deals. I had no plan except to find a place to go to the bathroom. Abner was already sidestepping down our narrow corridor toward the back door of the structure. Just at that moment, a brilliant flash of lightning lit up the whole ranch, and even though I knew it was coming, the clap of thunder that followed rattled my knees. In the glare of the flash, I saw Abner pick up a grubbing hoe. We edged ever so slowly outside the barn wall to keep our spurs quiet. By that time Benedict had returned.

"I'm a dollar short," he whined. "So take it or leave it."

"You're not cheating me tonight," Beatty insisted firmly.

Why they didn't hear Abner crack Junior's skull, I'll never know. Certainly I'll never forget the sound. Abner was lifting his belongings before he hit the ground, including a nice .33 revolver—so much better than Abner's stolen .32. Scared as I was, I couldn't help but laugh at Beatty stalling around, waiting for a man who, whether dead or alive (I never did find out) wasn't going to show for at least a week.

By then the wind was whipping every which way, scattering chicken feathers, old corn cobs, dust, and dirt in heavy gusts, punctuated by lightning and urged on by thunder. The moon was in and out of heavy clouds. Finally, Benedict just threw down a roll of bills in front of Beatty, scooped up the case of whiskey, and stomped off toward his house in the flickering electric flashes.

Beatty stormed cursing out the

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The wall of water hit us full force, knocking cows, horses, and riders into a plunging circle of panic. I grabbed for a tree limb.

barn door, right into Abner's club. The new body yielded cash and a great pocketknife. Drops of cold rain the size of shot glasses began to splatter here and there. As Abner stuck his loot down in his boots, he made impious remarks about his father's prayer efforts.

"Let's get out of here," I screamed, but that was too easy for Abner.

"We got our reputations to think of," he said illogically. "We come here to steal them cattle, so let's get to it."

"We got all we need," I reasoned.

"Best stick with the plan for safety's sake," he directed, knowing full well that I wouldn't go off on my own.

But he still wouldn't hurry, insisting on robbing the car of a little more petty cash, plus a nice jug of good whiskey. And then he further couldn't resist getting me to help him push the bootlegger's vehicle off the road in neutral, where it rolled out into the darkness, headed for the river. Nothing halfway was ever good enough for Abner.

The enormous raindrops continued to scatter. Gusts of cold wind swirled in the midst of warm air currents, and the eerie night was lit by demon lightning flashes and streaks. When we ran past the bodies, Beatty stirred and groaned a little bit, but Junior lay as composed as a corpse.

Believe me, those two heifers didn't want out from under that shed. It took the considerable cowboy talents Abner and I possessed to drive them into the growing storm. Of course we were riding two outstanding cow ponies (borrowed, at this point). We sandwiched the two Black Angus between and right ahead of us and pushed them toward the crossing and the safety of Jennings's place on the other side of the river.

It was going too easy. By all rights, the heifers shouldn't have driven so nicely, especially when smatterings of hail began to pelt us instead of the odd raindrops. The dark was no problem, for lightning brightened the river valley every few seconds.

We cut across the last ridge and stretched out down the slope for the ford in the steam when a fire bolt out of the sky showed us the river was already up. Until this point I had handled the stress fairly well. This last blow was almost too much.

"It must be raining upriver toward San Marcos," Abner said.

This proved the understatement of the year. We found out later that it was flooding all the way from Stairtown to Prairie Lea, running every rancher's rain gauge over so that the total was never measured.

"I'm turning back," I yelled. And for once I really was leaving him. The look on his face in the next blast of white lightning told me he hadn't heard me. That's when I became conscious of a roar that wasn't thunder.

Then the wall of water hit us full force, knocking cows, horses, and riders into a plunging circle of panic. Losing the saddle, I grabbed for a tree limb or anything handy. My hands closed around a Black Angus tail that slipped away from me in a moment. I went under, bumped off a submerged tree stump, and came up knocking heads with Abner.

"Relax and flow with the current," he sputtered.

I didn't relax, although I had no say in the matter of the powerful surge of water that spun us onto a low bank that used to be the high side on the Jennings place. Instinctively, we scrambled to even higher ground. By an incredible stroke of timing, we happened to be looking back across the raging torrent of water when a ribbon of lightning illuminated the whole incredible scene. Far across the current covering part of Benedict's best pecan grove, two riderless horses and two heifers were scrambling to safety.

"Somehow we got to swim back there and start over," Abner grinned, but his heart wasn't in it.

We lay back, belching muddy river water and trying in vain to light our sodden Chesterfields. Thunder rumbled behind us as the storm moved south on its volatile way to Mexico. Later we learned that the rainfall itself, from a storm that reached all the way upriver to San Marcos and far into the Texas hill country, pretty well stopped at Benedict's front gate.

"At least we got all that money," I said in a waterlogged voice.

"No, we ain't," Abner snorted, pointing to his bare left foot. "But we ain't out everything. I got the gun and the knife in my other boot," he added with characteristic optimism.

Together, Abner leaning on me, we three-legged it up to Jennings's shack, where he batched

alone in his poverty. Our host said little, only shaking his head in disbelief across his table in the glow of his coal-oil map while we smoked and sipped Irish coffee. Jennings gave Abner a pair of worn boots pretty close to his size. All our gear in those days was so scuffed and battered that no one would ever even notice the change in footwear. And Abner could always get another pair of spurs.

Soon we were bouncing back to recover our own horses in Jennings's pickup, which was held together mainly with baling wire. Jennings sat behind the wheel and moralized that it was best we didn't get the cattle. It was wrong, he said. This philosophy brought stern words of disagreement from Abner, who rated such thinking as the activity of a clouded intellect. Then my partner launched into his ribald version of "To a Mouse," and although the paraphrase of the line about "the best laid plans," etc., is too disgusting to include here, it was funny—in a vulgar sort of way, of course.

And so another rapacious action failed. In the days that followed we found out what we could about the other parties involved in the episode. Beatty wound up in the hospital with a fractured skull brought on by a car wreck—or so he said. Junior was never heard from again. What Benedict thought about his loose livestock, including two horses outfitted with his saddles, no one will ever know, but there is no mystery about what he did with the case of whiskey.

Abner and I were pretty stove up all day Saturday. Our recuperative powers were great, however, and Sunday morning, we were in our pews, as bright as ever.

Abner's father approached his lectern gravely. "The rain falls on the just and the unjust," he intoned majestically.

I couldn't bring myself to look at Abner, but I knew he was grinning.

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conti

Ed Whitley would always remember where he was and what he was doing when the old man had his heart attack: in the dusty corrals behind the barn, preg-checking a set of Bar W black baldy heifers.

It was not a dignified job for a cowboy who would much rather be on horseback, doing something else–anything else. It was not the pastoral western scene depicted on calendars or Christmas cards, and certainly not the stuff of song and story. It was messy work and smelled a little, but it had become an economic necessity of life for a rancher in a time of tight or negative profit margins. A dollar saved was better than a dollar earned, for it was not subject to income tax.

by
Elmer Kelton

To Ed's knowledge, his father had had no previous indications that a coronary was imminent. If there had been, the old man had remained tight-lipped about them. Tom Whitley had always regarded aches and pains as a personal affront, to be borne in silence. To complain was to give them importance.

Ed's probing fingers had just confirmed the presence of a developing calf when he saw Tom fall against the steel squeeze chute, one hand grasping for a rail, the other clutching at his chest. The old man's eyes were wide in surprise and pain and confusion, his mouth open for a cry that choked off before it started. Ed jerked his arm free and ripped off the shoulder-length plastic glove that had covered his hand and sleeve. He caught Tom and eased him to a sitting position on the ground.

ILLUSTRATION BY CATHY BLECK

n u i t y

Ed's grown son Clay vaulted over the crowding-pen fence and came running, along with ranch hand Miguel Cervantes.

The old man wheezed, "I'm all right. It's just that sausage I had for breakfast."

Ed knew better. He had seen that look before, when his neighbor Alex Hawkins had collapsed and died at the bankruptcy auction that sold out his cattle and rolling stock two years ago.

"Help me get him to the pickup," he shouted.

He had never understood how doctors could have such a dispassionate attitude in the face of suffering and human mortality. With no more emotion than if he was reading the cafeteria menu, the emergency-room doctor confirmed Ed's opinion that his father had suffered a heart attack.

"We will not know the extent of muscle damage or blockage until we have done an angiogram. We must assume, though, that it has been severe. I do not wish to sound alarmist, but you had better prepare yourself and your family for the worst."

"Dad's got a constitution like a horse. He hasn't had a sick day in his life, hardly."

"With an eighty-year-old heart, it may take only one."

Tom was eighty-two, if one wished to be technical about it, but he acted as if he was twenty or thirty years younger. He rode more miles a-horseback than Ed and far more than Clay, who lived in town and held down an eight-hours-a-day job at the feed mill. Clay helped at the ranch on weekends.

Tom persisted in wrestling fifty-pound feed sacks two at a time when Ed

It was not enough to pass on property. It was necessary to pass on knowledge and skills if the property was to have meaning and continuity.

was not looking. Somewhere in his sixties he seemed to have made up his mind not to get any older, but not to die, either. He had gotten away with it, except for a little arthritis in his joints that occasionally forced him into minor retreat but never into surrender. He had also come into increasing reliance on reading glasses. But he still ate beef for dinner and supper every day, using his own teeth.

In the back of his mind Ed had known his father could not live forever, but he had never allowed himself to dwell upon that. He could not visualize the ranch without Tom Whitley. From Ed's earliest memories, Tom and the home place had been one and the same, inseparable. Tom's father, Ed's grandfather, had acquired the nucleus of the ranch around the turn of the century, homesteading four sections under Texas law. Tom had been born there and over the years had more than doubled the size of the place. With Ed's help he had cleared the land debt so that the ranch now was free and clear.

"Ready to pass on, without no encumbrance," Tom had said when they paid the final note. But Tom had shown no inclination to pass it on. Now Ed had to face the shattering probability that the time had come. Nothing would ever again be as it had been. He could see no continuity between the past and the future. Losing Tom would be like cutting a tree off from its roots.

They moved Tom into the intensive care unit. The hospital had rules about visitation, but it was lax on enforcement in regard to family members. Ed never asked permission to stay in the room with his father, and nobody contested him. For a long time Tom seemed to be asleep. He was hooked to a monitor, its green screen showing heartbeats as a series of bobbles up and down from a straight line. Ed would watch the screen awhile, then stare at Tom, forcing up old memories as if he had to retrieve them now or lose them as he was losing his father. Most were pleasant, or at least benign.

He could not remember a great deal about his grandfather. The face that came to his mind's eye owed more to old photographs than to life. He knew that Morgan Whitley had come of age in the waning years of the great trail drives and the open range. The ranch's outside fence still retained segments of the original wire and posts that Morgan had installed some ninety years ago, though the toll of time had caused most to be rebuilt in recent years. Even when replacing it, Tom and Ed had coiled and saved some of the rusty old wire and hung it on the barn wall as a keepsake, for Morgan's strong hands had once gripped it. A lively imagination could fantasize that his fingerprints were still fixed upon the steel strands.

Many ranches had unbroken family ownership into the third, fourth, and fifth generations. It conveyed, in a peculiar way, a sort of immortality to those who had gone on. This continuity fostered a reverence for the land as if it were a living member of the family. It engendered in the later generations a strong urge to protect and improve rather than to mine the land for immediate gain at the expense of the future.

But Ed feared for that continuity when Tom was gone. Tom's boots made big tracks, as his father's had before him. Ed felt inadequate to fill them. His life had been relatively easy compared to Tom's and to Morgan's. Most of the building had been completed before he had come of age. He had inherited the fruit without having to dig through the rock and plant the tree.

This was Saturday, so Clay was not on duty at the mill. He had remained at the corrals to finish the day's job. It was an unwritten tenet of ranch life that not even an emergency should interrupt work in progress if any alternative was available. Ed arose from the hard chair as Clay and Ed's wife Frances came into the room. Neither asked aloud, for they could not be certain that Tom would not hear. Ed answered just as silently with a shrug of his shoulders, followed by a solemn shaking of his head. Frances slipped her arm around his waist, offering him emotional support. Clay said his young wife Susan was downstairs with their five-year-old son. The hospital did not allow children into ICU.

Clay moved close to his grandfather's bedside and stared down gravely into the lined face that had been a part of his daily life as far back as memory went. Tears welled into his eyes.

When Ed had been a boy, Tom had been demanding of him—often unreasonably demanding, in Ed's view. He remembered a time when Tom had taken a dislike to Ed's way of mounting a horse and had made him practice getting on

and off until Ed had thought his legs would collapse. Tom had drilled him mercilessly in the art of roping, making him do it over and over, day after day, until he rarely missed a loop. Not until years later did Tom confide that his own father had done the same thing to him. It was not enough to pass on property. It was necessary to pass on knowledge and skills if the property was to have meaning and continuity.

Tom had mellowed by the time his grandson had come along. He had shown infinitely more patience in teaching Clay the cowboy trade. At those rare times when discipline was called for, Tom had walked away and left that painful duty to Ed.

Odd, Ed thought, how sometimes the further apart people were in age, the closer they seemed in their relationships with one another.

The boy had learned diligently, polishing the horseback skills passed down from his great-grandfather Morgan through Tom, then through Ed and finally to Clay.

an accomplishment Tom had always regarded with a conflicting mixture of pride and distrust. "Most of what I know about a cow," he had often declared, "you ain't goin' to find in no Aggie textbook."

Tom's eyelids fluttered awhile before he opened his eyes, blinking as his vision adjusted itself to the fluorescent lights of the hospital room. He focused first on Tom and Frances, then let his gaze drift to Clay. At first he seemed confused about his surroundings. Ed grasped his father's hand to keep him from tearing loose the tube that fed him glucose.

Anyone else might have asked how he had come to be where he was or what kind of shape he was in, but not Tom. He had always been one to take care of business first. "You-all finish with them heifers?"

Clay said, "We did, Granddad—Miguel and me. They were all settled but three."

"Hell of a note, stoppin' work to rush me in here like this when there wasn't nothin' wrong except overdone myself workin' that squeeze chute. Never did see that we need to preg-test those heifers. You can tell soon enough which ones come up heavy with calf and which ones don't."

Ed could have told him, as he had before, that checking the heifers early for pregnancy allowed for culling of the slow breeders before they had time to run up an unnecessary feed bill. Moreover, high fertility was a heritable characteristic. The early breeders were the kind a rancher wanted to keep in his herd, for they passed that trait on to their offspring. The slow ones were a drag on the bottom line.

But to Tom, that had always been an Aggie textbook notion. He distrusted selection judgments based on records or mechanical measurements. He preferred to rely upon his eyes.

He had not thought much of artificial insemination either, when Ed had first brought it to the ranch.

Tom had not always been so reluctant to try new ideas. Neither, for that matter, had Ed's grandfa-

Through thrift and careful borrowing, Tom had managed to add on to the ranch, each addition coming over Morgan's strong objections.

Frontier realities had limited Morgan Whitley's formal schooling to a couple of years, though he had acquired a liberal education in the school of practical experience, with graduate honors in hard knocks. Better times had allowed Tom to finish high school before turning to a full-time career as a working cowpuncher and eventual partnership with his father.

Ed, the third generation, had gone on to earn a degree in animal husbandry at Texas A&M. It was

that sausage. I could tell the minute I ate it . . ."

Ed said, "It's a lot more than the sausage. Doctor says it's your heart." He stopped there. He thought it best not to tell his father how serious his condition really was unless it became necessary to prevent him from climbing out of bed. It would be like Tom to get in the pickup and head for the ranch in his hospital gown if they wouldn't give him his shirt and Levi's.

Tom grumbled, "Probably just

ther Morgan, up to a point. Though Morgan had been a product of the open range, he had built a barbed-wire fence around the perimeter of his holdings as soon as he had been financially able to buy cedar posts and wire. That had allowed him to keep his own cattle in and his neighbors' out. He had gradually upgraded the quality of his herd through use of better sires without his cows' being subject to the amorous attentions of inferior stray bulls.

But as the years went by, Mor-

gan had become increasingly conservative, content with things as they were and quick to reject the innovations of a younger generation. He had looked askance upon the advent of the automobile and truck as tools of the ranching trade. He argued that anything he needed could be carried by a good wagon and team. As for cattle and horses, they could walk anywhere it was needful for them to go; they didn't have to be hauled.

He and his son had almost come to a fistfight over Tom's purchase of a light truck. In time he became accepting enough to ride in a truck or car, but to the end he stubbornly refused to place his hands on the wheel of one.

Tom often told about building his first horse trailer. He had long wished for a way to eliminate the waste of time involved in riding horseback to a far corner of the ranch to do a job, then returning home the same slow away. It took longer to get there and back than to do the work. He acquired the chassis of a wrecked Model T and stripped it down to the wheels and frame. Atop this he built a three-sided wooden box with a gate in the rear. Crude though it was, it could haul two horses, pulled by the truck.

Morgan had ridiculed the idea. "First thing you know, you'll never see a cowboy ridin' anymore, or a horse walkin'."

Gradually, however, the horse trailer became a regular and accepted fact of survival in the ranching business. It allowed more work to be done in less time and with less labor.

Through thrift and careful borrowing, Tom had managed to add on to the ranch, each addition and each mortgage coming over Morgan's strong objections and predictions of imminent ruin. He had brought a telephone to the ranch, and a gasoline-driven generator to furnish limited 32-volt power so the two houses and the barn could have electric lights. He had even bought Morgan a radio in hopes it would keep his widowed father from feeling so lonely when he sat alone at night in the original old ranch house. At least, he argued, Morgan could keep up with the world news.

"You're wastin' your money," Morgan had declared. "I won't ever listen to the thing. I won't even turn it on."

Tom had often delighted in telling about the time a few weeks later when conversation somehow turned to country music, and old Morgan exclaimed, "Say, that Uncle Dave Macon can sure play the banjo, can't he?"

The aging open-range cowboy had died just before the outbreak of World War II, leaving Tom to run the ranch after his own lights. Tom had sometimes wondered aloud how his father would have reacted to the technological innovations that war and its aftermath had wrought upon the ranching industry.

Tom had cross-fenced the ranch for better control of grazing. He had replaced the generator with REA electricity. But in time he had settled into the same brand of conservatism as his father when it came to modern innovations. He treated with skepticism many of the ideas Ed brought home from A&M.

"Aggie textbook notions," he would snort. Some he accepted after a time. Others he never did.

Despite heavy medication, Tom awoke in the early morning hours, as he was accustomed to doing at home. Ed's back ached from sitting up all night in the straight hard-backed chair. He suspected that hospitals purposely installed uncomfortable furniture to discourage visitors from staying too long. Tom stared at his son with concern in his eyes.

"You ever get anything to eat last night?"

"I slipped away for a bite with Frances while Clay was here."

"You better go and get you some breakfast, else you'll be the one sick in here instead of me."

"Later. I don't want to miss seein' the doctor."

"Ain't no doctor goin' to show up this early unless he's still here this late."

"I'll be all right."

Tom stared at him awhile. "Sure, you'll be all right. Ever since you were old enough to straddle a horse, I've been tryin' to get you ready for this. Now it's come time, ready or not."

Ed realized his father was not just thinking about Ed's immediate need for nourishment. "Don't you be talkin' thataway. You'll be out of here in a few days if you'll do what they tell you."

"I'm goin' out of here in that long black wagon. We both know that. I could feel old St. Peter

e don't none of us—old or young—ever have it just the way we'd want it, and that's probably a good thing," Tom said.

breathin' on my neck half the night. But you'll be all right. What you goin' to do about Clay?"

"What's there to do about him?"

"You'll have to talk him into leavin' that piddlin' job at the mill. You'll need his help full-time when I'm gone."

Ed's throat tightened painfully. He did not want to talk about this, but Tom was persistent. He seemed to sense that he did not have a lot of time to get the talking done.

Tom said, "He's a good boy, even if he *has* got some newfangled ideas. Some of them'll work, and some won't. You'll have to get a feel for how tight to hold the reins, and how loose, same as I did with you and my daddy did with me."

Ed did not know how to reply. It hurt too much to acknowledge what Tom was saying. "You'll come through this all right," he said, though the words were hollow. He knew differently, and so did Tom.

way we'd want it, and that's probably a good thing."

Though some ranchers saw Sunday as just another day for work—it seemed there never were enough days to do it all—Tom Whitley had always accepted Sunday as a day of rest. It was fitting, Ed thought later, that on a Sunday he slipped away into his final rest. Helplessly Ed watched the monitor screen as the line jumped violently up and down, then flattened. The most strenuous efforts of doctor and nurses could not alter the inexorable course of nature.

Frances was with Ed at the end, and so was Clay. It helped, not having to face this dark moment alone.

Ed said quietly, "I don't know how we'll survive without him, son."

"What did he do when *his* dad died?"

"He picked himself up and went his own way."

place in the stanchion. All these things were the same as they had been for years and years. In these, at least, there was constancy.

But Tom's red dog, tail wagging, came out to meet the car. It watched Ed and Frances get out, then looked expectantly for its master. It turned away, its tail drooping in disappointment. It retreated toward the house where Tom had lived since Ed's mother had died, and Tom had turned the larger, newer house over to Ed and Frances. Ed watched the dog and felt anew the pain of loss.

"We'll have to get Red used to comin' to our house for his supper," he said.

Frances nodded. "It'll take him awhile to quit missin' Tom."

Ed winced. "I doubt I ever will."

The dog never did become accustomed to staying around the bigger house. It did not have to. Clay resigned his job at the feed mill, and he and Susan moved

> "I've figured how we can divide up our pastures and have four grazin' cells," Clay said. "It's worked on a lot of other ranches."

Tom said, "That's the way of the world. It's up to the young ones to keep movin' forward, and up to the older ones to keep the young from runnin' the train off of the track. And it's why the old have to pass out of the picture, so the train won't come to a stop altogether and maybe even slide back down the hill."

"Things wouldn't ever be the same out there without you."

"They ain't meant to be. If my daddy had had his way, we'd still be drivin' cattle afoot to the railroad. If *his* daddy had had his way, there wouldn't even be no railroad. We don't none of us—old or young—ever have it just the

Clay gently laid a hand on his father's shoulder. "Then that's what we'll do."

The return to the ranch after the funeral was one of the most trying ordeals of Ed's life. He tried to find comfort in the fact that nothing physical had changed. The entrance gate, the headquarters layout, all looked the same as he drove in. Four horses stood near the barn, waiting for someone to fork hay into the steel rack. Either Tom or Ed customarily did so in the late afternoon. A Jersey milk cow stood outside the milk-pen gate, patiently awaiting the bucket of ground feed that would be poured for her as she took her

into Tom's house. Though it was old and still bore much of Morgan Whitley's imprint, as well as Tom's, it had most of the modern conveniences that a town girl like Susan was used to.

Clay's being around all the time helped Ed's adjustment to the change. Before, Ed had tried to see to it that he and Miguel did the heavier and more menial work, leaving the lighter chores for Tom. Now Clay and Miguel took on most of the heavier lifting, and Ed found himself doing more of the things that Tom had regarded as his own province. Ed resented it a little at first, though he kept his feelings to himself. It

"You were worried that things could never be the same with Granddad gone," Clay said. "But you've fitted right into his boots."

seemed they now considered him an old man who had to be sheltered. He was not old, not by a damn sight. But after a time he began to appreciate their deference. His back did not hurt as much as it used to, and he found himself able to spend more time on horseback, riding over the country the way he liked to do.

It warmed Ed's soul, too, to look toward the older house and see Clay's boy Billy riding a stick horse in the front yard. It was high time, Ed thought, to find a pony so the boy could start learning to ride. Billy's cowboy education had been neglected in town. Ed would get him a rope, too, and a plastic steer head to attach to a bale of hay so he could learn to throw a loop around the horns.

Ed sensed that something had begun to nag at Clay. His son became subject to long periods of thoughtful silence, as if he had something on his mind that he was reluctant to voice.

Whatever the problem was, Ed decided the time had come to bring it into the open air. One possibility had occurred to him early. "Is it Susan and that house? I know it's old, and I guess it's got Dad's brand all over it. My grandad's, too. But she's welcome to redo it any way she wants to. It's her house now."

Clay seemed surprised at the thought. "The house is fine. She loves it. We like the idea that we're the fourth generation of Whitleys that's lived in it, and Billy's the fifth. It's like they're all still with us, that nobody's gone."

Ed wished he could see it that way. Tom *was* gone. The root had been severed. The feeling of continuum was lost.

"Well, if it's not the house, what's the trouble?"

Clay frowned, and he took a while in bringing himself to answer. "I've been workin' on an idea. I've been kind of shy about bringin' it up because I don't know how you'll take it."

"Spill it, and we'll find out."

"You've heard them talk about cell grazin' plans, where they take a pasture and fence it up into twelve or fifteen small paddocks. They throw all their cattle onto one at a time and move them every two or three days. That way most of the ranch is restin', and the grass has a chance to grow. It makes for a healthier range."

Ed could only stare at him.

Clay took a sheet of paper from his shirt pocket and unfolded it. Ed recognized a pencil-drawn map of the ranch. Clay placed a finger on the spot that marked the headquarters. "I've figured how we can divide up all our pastures with cheap electric fence and have ourselves four grazin' cells. It's worked on lots of other ranches."

"But this isn't some other ranch." Ed's impatience bubbled to the top. He could imagine Morgan's or Tom's reaction to such a far-fetched idea. "Where did you ever come up with such a radical notion—some Aggie textbook?"

Aggie textbook! Ed wondered for a moment how that expression had popped into his head. Then he remembered. He had heard it from Tom—more times than he wanted to recall.

Looking deflated, Clay studied the paper. "I've had the idea for a long while. I knew better than to try it on Granddad, but I thought you might give it a chance."

"He would've said what I did."

"In the same voice, and the same words, more than likely." Clay managed a wry smile through his disappointment. "You even look like him at a little distance. Funny, you were worried that things could never be the same with Granddad gone. But you've fitted right into his boots."

Ed pondered on what Tom had said about it being the responsibility of the young to originate fresh ideas while the old held the reins, loosening or tightening them as the need came.

Ed compromised, as Tom often had. "Tell you what: we'll try your idea, but we'll go at it slow. We'll take the northeast pasture first and see how it works out. In two or three years, if we like it, we'll talk about doin' the rest of the place. This is a drastic change you're throwin' at me."

"As drastic as Granddad buyin' the first truck, or buildin' the first trailer? Or you startin' artificial insemination and preg-checkin'?"

Ed stared toward the old house. Billy was in the front yard, playing with the red dog. Red had taken right up with the boy, tagging along with him as he had tagged after Tom. Ed thought about Tom, and about Morgan Whitley. The word came to him from somewhere. "Continuity."

Clay puzzled. "What do you mean, continuity?"

"Just thinkin' about somethin' your granddad said. I'll tell you someday, when it's time for *you* to think about it."

by
Johnny
D.
Boggs

Blue

They gave me a medal for losing my left leg—a five-point star hanging from an eagle; worn ribbon; scroll-work I can't make out anymore. It has bought me more drinks than I can count, meals here and there—even a woman, ages ago. People are impressed by the Congressional Medal of Honor. But the man who really deserved it died a prisoner, forgotten and betrayed.

I arrived in Arizona Territory fresh from West Point, a second lieutenant eager to prove his worth in the United States Fourth Cavalry. Born in Philadelphia, I had never seen an Indian—except for the drawings in *Harper's* and *Collier's*—so I went to the desert with an open mind, the byproduct of being raised by a college professor and a Quaker's daughter.

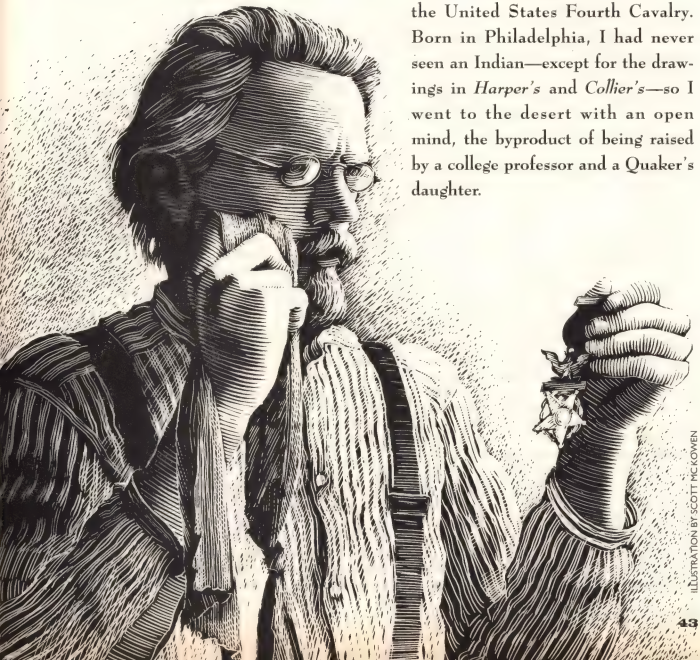

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT MCKOWEN

The scouts were dirty, with long, greasy black hair, worn clothes, calf-high moccasins. Most had red headbands, but a few had hats.

It did not take me long to draw a conclusion.

My first detail was to lead a patrol to a Catholic mission just north of Sonora, where a passerby had reported smoke and gunfire. Our orders were to aid the priest and pursue any Apaches but not cross the border. An agreement signed a few years earlier permitted Mexican and American regular troops to cross the boundary in pursuit of Apaches, but Major Beaumont, my commanding officer, wasn't about to let a green officer enter Mexico. Both were moot points, however. The Apaches were long gone and the padre beyond aid.

"Dear God," I said, then choked back bile as I stared at a sight never described in the Eastern magazines.

"Damned Chiricahua Apaches," Sergeant Bayley said.

The priest had been dead about two days.

I almost fell from my horse, clumsily dismounting, and threw up. Bayley calmly ordered two troopers to bury the priest, then dismounted and knelt by me.

"Lieutenant Haskell, sir? You gonna live?"

I swallowed and stared at Bayley. "Dear God, Sergeant, doesn't this bother you?"

Bayley pushed his slouch hat back. "Sir, I've been in this man's army since the Rebellion, fighting Injuns since 'sixty-six. Sure, it bothers you, but you get used to it. Hell, sir, this ain't even bad yet."

He was right.

I had arrived in Arizona for one of the bloodiest Apache wars. My third detail found a settler's family in the White River Basin wiped out.

After a few more patrols, I had seen enough of the Apaches' handiwork. My mother brought me up on the Ten Commandments, but six months in Arizona Territory was long enough for me to realize I had come to hate those Indians. It was then that Major Beaumont put me in charge of the Apache scouts.

Young lieutenants don't question their orders, so I took the assignment without complaint. There was a saying in Arizona that went, "It takes an Apache to track an Apache," and I could attest to its veracity, having never seen a hostile—just what they left behind. General Crook had enjoyed much success with Apache scouts in the 1870s and planned on reaping the benefits again.

I thought my scouts to be a sorry lot when I saw them standing around the sutler's store. They were dirty, with long, greasy black hair, worn clothes, calf-high moccasins. Most had red headbands, but a few donned hats, and one wore a blue silk headband. The latter stood unmoving, his black eyes never leaving me, never blinking. He was like a cigar-store Indian—stoic, wooden, and unfeeling.

Sergeant Bayley, fluent in Spanish like several of the scouts, introduced me as their leader. One nodded—the only response from a group of twenty. Bayley turned to me and said, "Sir, you probably should pick one to be your top soldier—preferably one who speaks English pretty good." Before he could offer any suggestions I said, "Blue headband."

Bayley laughed, barked something in Spanish, and the Apache stepped forward. He wore deerskin britches, knee-high moccasins, and an old army fatigue blouse. A knife was sheathed on his left hip and he carried a regulation Springfield carbine in his left hand. "Blue," Bayley said. "That's your name from now on."

Boredom marked the first expedition with the Apache scouts. I kept as much distance as possible from my charges, picking up some Spanish but little else. But these details were north of the border. Suddenly, Major Beaumont ordered me to lead my scouts into Mexico in pursuit of a group of Apaches that had fled San Carlos Reservation to join Geronimo. We were to intercept the fugitives and return them to San Carlos. Ten other Apache scouts from Fort Apache and a civilian scout and interpreter named Harry Andanzas would accompany us, but there would be no other regular soldiers.

"Lieutenant Haskell, sir," Bayley told me, "you keep Blue close and watch yourself. Many a man has got his butt shot off down there."

It was a reminder I didn't need. I asked about Andanzas and Bayley spit.

"He'd rather sell scalps to the Mexicans than scout for us, sir."

"Good for him," I said, and Bayley frowned. The Mexican government offered a bounty for any Apache scalp brought in and I saw nothing wrong with the idea, although I never would have admitted such to my mother and father. I know Bayley thought I was wrong, but he was a soldier and wouldn't say it.

"Just the same, I wouldn't trust Andanzas. But I'd trust Blue."

And he was gone. It was the only time he never "sirred" me.

We crossed the border just east of the Dragoon Mountains on Christmas Day, 1885. The weather was windy and cold—I never realized how cruel winters in the desert could be—but Harry Andanzas didn't mind. He was constantly smiling, sipping from his pewter flask, gossiping about General Crook, Apache scouts, women, and whiskey. He was a vile, wretched thing in Mexican denim and cowhide. Not a man I'd introduce to my mother, but he seemed to know his business.

And the Apaches seemed to fear him. Except Blue, who gave him the same rigid, unfeeling stare he gave everything. In fact, I thought I could see fear in Andanzas's eyes whenever Blue was around.

"Rumors going around at Apache and Grant that these Apache scouts," Andanzas began, then shouted just so the nearby scouts could hear, "been selling ammunition and guns to the hostiles." He laughed, then looked at the scouts for reaction, which wasn't there.

He was riding beside me, much to my displeasure. I was starting to loathe him, mostly his whiskey and sour smell, more than Apaches. "Wouldn't put it past 'em," he said, then held out his flask, which I politely refused. "Crook's a fool if he thinks these bastards'll help bring in Geronimo. They ain't gonna kill another 'pache. Mexicans got the right idea—kill 'em all."

We camped near a juniper grove that night, and it was there that I saw my first hostile Apache. Blue and a scout named Lagarto rode into camp and dumped the dead brave by our campfire. A rifle bullet had left a neat hole behind his right ear and a gruesome one where his nose should have been.

What once would have forced up my supper had no effect now. "Report," I said, sipping coffee. Andanzas knelt by the dead brave and went through his body for valuables. "He make trouble," Blue said. "He make trouble no more."

> "There'll be no scalping here," I told Andanzas. "Blue, form a detail and bury this hostile."

Lagarto smiled. He was the exact opposite of Blue. Younger, laughing, wearing kersey blue trousers and a sutler's shirt, Lagarto was traveling the "white man's road" at a high lope. He spoke English well for an Apache, and added to Blue's succinct account. "He fired on us in canyon ten miles south. Bad hombre. Used to get drunk on tizwin on reservation and beat wives. Been making trouble long time." Then he motioned to Blue. "While I cover, he sneak around and shoot him."

"Part of that group we're after, Haskell," Andanzas said. He withdrew his knife and raised the dead Apache's hair. Blue's grip must have been like a vise, because Andanzas groaned and dropped the blade quickly, then yelled as Blue sent him rolling over the campfire. The interpreter came up palming for his revolver, but stopped at the sound of several rifles being cocked. I think every Apache in camp would have delighted in shooting him, and I don't think I would have cared.

"There'll be no scalping here," I told him. "Blue, form a detail and bury this hostile." As the Apaches turned away, I walked toward Andanzas, who had wisely left his revolver holstered and was holding his aching wrist. "I'd say Blue proved your theory wrong," I said. Andanzas looked at me, uncomprehending. "That an Apache scout won't kill another 'pache." It didn't dawn upon me until later that night what I had done.

I had defended an Apache.

The next hostile Apache I saw was also dead. And this one had a lot of company.

We saw the buzzards circling first. I sent Blue and Lagarto ahead to check, and we cautiously rode on, arms at the ready. In a canyon were the hostiles we had been pursuing, but these wouldn't cause anyone trouble.

Even a green army lieutenant from Pennsylvania could figure this one out. Sharpshooters had lined the high canyon walls. With no cover on the ground or along the base, the Apaches had been shot down—men, women and children. And there was no doubt as to who had killed them.

Twenty-two bodies lay on the ground. All had been shot, many several times. Fifteen bodies had been scalped. The other seven had been decapitated.

"Mexicans getting a little peculiar these days about paying bounties. They wanna see a head," Andanzas said, then laughed. "Hard to tell a hostile scalp from a friendly." His laugh grew even louder. "Hard to tell a 'pache scalp from a Mexican's, too."

Shutting my eyes, I choked back the urge to strangle my civilian interpreter. "Gettin' late, Haskell. We gonna move on or what?"

I stood quickly, "We're gonna bury these people, Andanzas. Then we'll camp here and return to Fort Bowie in the morning."

"Leave 'em for the buzzards. I ain't burying no damned 'paches."

knew then that my scouts were men of honor, and Blue perhaps the most honorable. They were fighting for their beliefs.

He stormed to his horse, mounted it, and rode out of the canyon.

Good riddance, I thought, then walked around the massacre site. My emotions were caught in a tug of war. I had seen mutilations, had hated Apaches. But I had never seen scalpings, headless bodies—Apaches didn't do it. I hadn't felt like this since finding the dead priest on my first mission.

Scouts were uncomfortably moving among the dead bodies—Apaches had an almost childlike fear of the dead—looking for friends, loved ones they had been tracking. The cold air burned my lungs as I took a deep breath. "Now I know why Apaches hate Mexicans," I said to myself, then realized the irony of my statement.

I found Blue kneeling over the body of a young woman, maybe in her late teens. Blue was gently fingering her forehead, just below the bloody mess where her hair had been ripped.

"You know this girl, Blue?" I asked.

Maybe three or four minutes passed before he replied. *"Es mi hermana,"* he said quietly in Spanish.

I dropped to my knees. "Your sister? Dear God, Blue." His hands kept moving gingerly across her bloody forehead, but his face remained sandstone. Suddenly I felt for him, although I still didn't understand him. "You knew your sister was in this group, but you still helped track them. Why?" I asked.

This was beyond comprehension. I was born toward the end of the War of the Rebellion and my father had avoided the conflict, so the idea of brother against brother was foreign to me. Blue looked up, studied me for a minute, then pointed to his army blouse. "I say words," he said. "I am scout."

Suddenly, I realized that we were at war, and war's hell is not one-sided. Sure, Apaches had murdered that priest, the family in the White River Basin, and many others. But as I looked across the canyon, I knew these Indians had been victims of depredations, too. This might not be the kind of war we studied at the Point, but it was war nonetheless, with political objectives. Our government believed Apaches would be better off on reservations; Apaches wanted their freedom; Mexicans wanted them dead. We all had reasons. And caught in the middle were the Apache scouts.

I knew then that my scouts were men of honor, and Blue perhaps the most honorable. They were fighting for their beliefs, for themselves, and honor came before blood. Blue would not break his word—he didn't understand the meaning of the word *lie*. When he had enlisted as a scout and put on his army fatigue blouse, he had become a soldier. A top soldier. A second lieutenant's dream.

A sudden feeling of pride for my command surged through my body.

We dug a pit in the middle of the canyon, and began throwing the bodies and their effects in it shortly before dusk. Maybe half the corpses were in it when the gunshot echoed loudly, and I saw an old scout stagger and fall forward. Suddenly, the air was humming with lead and the gunshots echoed louder than thunder.

At the top of the canyons snipers fired and fired. I drew my service revolver and realized we were in the same predicament as the massacred Apaches had been in. *"Soldados Americanos!"* I shouted. *"Soldados Americanos!"* Then I saw one of the shooters and realized that these men didn't care if we were American soldiers or not. They were scalp hunters, out to massacre the scouts for their hair. The man I recognized was Harry Andanzas.

A bullet took off my slouch hat, and I ducked and fired a fruitless shot, looking for some cover. A scout running toward me was shot in the chest and fell into the grave, and then it hit me. "Into the grave!" I yelled, then repeated the order in Spanish. One thing I learned at West Point was that a trench was a good place to be. I ran toward the grave, yelling my orders again, when intense pain racked me from my kneecap to my head—it felt as if a scythe had chopped my leg off from the kneecap down—and I hit the ground hard.

The bullet had entered the back of my left thigh, traveled downward and smashed my kneecap. I was bleeding profusely, sweating even more, and hurting worse than I had ever imagined was possible. And I was twenty-five yards from the mass grave, unable to get there.

Then Blue was out of the hole, zigzagging his way toward me as gunfire from the grave covered him. He lifted me to his shoulders effortlessly, then made the return trip as a few bullets sang over our heads. Into the grave we fell, on top of the dead, and then hugged

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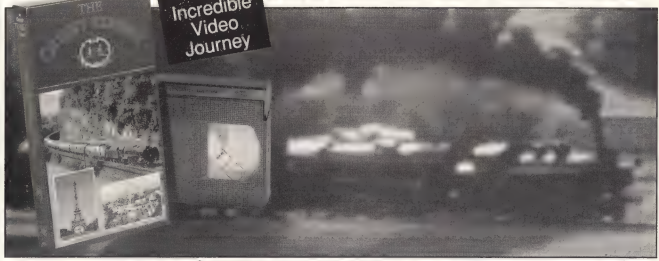

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The Apache war was about to get hotter, but I would not be a part of it. Neither would most of the Apache scouts.

the sides of the trench for dear life.

Blue removed his silk headband and wrapped it around my leg with the barrel of my revolver to make a tourniquet. I tried to issue orders but managed only to spit saliva and groan. We heard the scalp hunters curse above us, for Andanzas had not deployed his men adequately. The bulk of them were on the west top of the canyon, and the trench and mound of dirt provided us with ample cover. The east top of the canyon had little cover for the handful of men there; they could not get a clear shot at us without the risk of being killed by the scouts. Plus, the setting sun now spoiled their aim.

"We wait till dark," Blue said. "Then go."

Luckily, darkness fell fast because I don't know how much longer my scouts would have stayed in that grave. Six Apache scouts were left dead in that canyon, along with several horses—the rest had scattered during the fight. That night, the Apaches sneaked to the west wall of the canyon, one by one, as quiet as the night, and silently walked along the base.

"Leave me," I managed to tell Blue. "I'll slow you down." But Blue lifted me again, clamped his hand over my mouth to keep me quiet—the pain was still intense—and climbed out of the grave.

Near the mouth of the canyon, Lagarto stopped us. It was pitch black, but I saw his teeth as he smiled. "Two sentries ahead," he whispered, which I should have figured. Andanzas would want to make sure we wouldn't escape during the night. Lagarto's smile widened. "They sorry for their trouble."

We passed the two at their camp, where they had stupidly lit a campfire. Both were Americans, covered with blood from slit throats.

Blue carried me the entire night and all the next day, never complaining, never faltering. Two days south of Fronteras we ran into a Mexican mule train, which carried us into town. There, we managed to procure a couple of wagons and limped back across the border to Fort Bowie.

I wish my story ended there on a happy note. True, I lost the lower half of my leg, but I kept my life, thanks to Blue. Often I've wondered what became of Andanzas. I'd like to think that Apaches killed him as Lagarto did those two sentries, but I doubt it. In my experience, the good die needlessly, while the evil live forever.

While I recovered at the post hospital, the Army's Department of Arizona underwent massive changes. Those rumors of Apaches selling ammo and guns to hostiles had spread and, despite General Crook's protests, Washington began to question the usefulness and sincerity of Apache scouts. In March, General Crook negotiated a surrender with Geronimo, but the hostiles escaped during the return. Washington questioned how Geronimo could have gotten away without the knowledge of the Apache scouts. The discussions became heated and soon Crook requested to be replaced.

I met the general once. Having grown tired of the hospital, I grabbed my crutches and had Sergeant Bayley drive me to Bowie Station. Crook was there, watching soldiers load seventy-seven Chiricahua captives—the bulk of them women and children—on a train for Florida. Arizona and Washington wanted the Apaches gone, so the captives were being sent to Fort Marion. The Apaches looked nervous—the men more so than the women and children. As the train pulled away, the Apaches' dogs, perhaps twenty or more, chased the locomotive and cars. The train gained speed, and the yelping line of dogs thinned, but many continued running down the tracks, disappearing into the desert.

It was heartbreaking as some of the dogs, crying and unable to keep up with the train, limped back to Bowie Station. I saw sadness in Crook's blue-gray eyes when he turned to leave.

"Guess it's bad, General, but I reckon it's for the best, sir," Bayley said, and Crook stopped. He held his hat in his hands like a man at a funeral, his eyes were downcast, and even that thick, forked beard seemed to be drooping.

"Bad, Sergeant?" Crook said. "I fear it hasn't reached bad yet."

On April 12, General Nelson A. Miles took over in Arizona and let it be known he would wage a total war against the hostiles. The Apache war was about to get hotter, but I would not be a part of it. Neither would most of the Apache scouts. Miles dismissed them and they returned to San Carlos. I stayed at Fort Bowie, and when infection ravaged my leg, doctors sawed off more.

I awoke on my cot one afternoon and saw Blue packing a poultice against the nub of my leg. He

turned when I groaned. "You leave on," he said, pointing to the poultice. "It heal."

We stared at each other a moment, and I noticed he wasn't wearing a headband. "I have your headband. I'll get it for you," but Blue shook his head. "Bring to San Carlos when you better," he said, and walked away.

But that wasn't to be. As Miles tried negotiating a surrender, someone decided sending hostiles to Florida wasn't good enough. Arizona, they said, wouldn't be safe until every Apache was dead or gone. In early September, Geronimo surrendered to Miles at Skeleton Canyon. A couple of weeks later, Sergeant Bayley visited me at the post hospital. I could see in his eyes that something was wrong.

"They've marched Blue and most of the others off for Holbrook, sir. Shipping them to Florida with the rest."

As Blue, Lagarto, and other Apaches were loaded onto an Atlantic and Pacific train and sent to Fort Marion, Florida, as prisoners of war, I almost busted up the hospital with my crutches. The man who had saved my life deserved better treatment than this.

Crook was right. It had gotten worse, and it continued to plummet. Sending Apache scouts to prison—even those who had helped negotiate Geronimo's surrender—disgusted a lot of soldiers. I resigned my commission, argued, wrote to Washington and to newspapers, all to no avail. For years, I fought for a new cause—that of the Apache nation—and corresponded frequently with General Crook, another champion for the Apaches. But Crook died in 1890, and my health soon failed.

I drifted, drinking, letting my medal buy what I needed. Eventually I returned to Philadelphia, where my parents tried to nurse me back to health and respectability. Like my efforts to help the Apache cause, my parents failed, and soon I headed west again.

By chance, my return trip included a stop at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where Captain Richard Pratt ran his Indian Industrial School, founded to help Indians travel the white man's road. On crutches, I walked around the grounds, looking for my former charges. And then I heard a familiar voice behind me.

His hair was close-cropped and he was wearing a suit, but there was no mistaking Lagarto's smile. We chatted a bit, and finally I asked about Blue. His features tightened, and for the first time, I saw him frown. Even when those scalp hunters had had us pinned down, he was smiling.

"Blue dead," he said. "Prison not good for spirit."

I felt sick, hurt. Several Apaches, used to the high desert, had died at the malarial prisons in Florida and Alabama. Died of fevers, and like Blue, broken spirits. Lagarto left, and I hobbled to the train station and traveled west. Missouri, Colorado, California, the goldfields of Alaska. But never back to Arizona.

Two months ago, out of money and in need of a drink, I dug through my chest to find my medal, always sure to prompt money, meals, and whiskey from anyone who was even slightly patriotic. I found the medal easily enough, wrapped in a piece of cloth. But this time, I set the medal down and fondled the piece of material, pressed it to my lips, eventually used it to wipe the tears from my cheeks.

It was a worthless piece of blue silk, stained with blood. An old headband that had helped stem the flow of blood and save my life in Mexico. Once, it belonged to an Apache, a soldier betrayed by the United States government for which he had fought. I owed this man everything, yet I never knew his real name.

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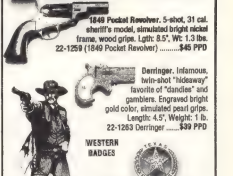

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In the Name of the Land

"It ain't fair, I tell ya, it just ain't fair!" Obie Ogden cried from the back of the courthouse. "I bought that land with honest money and I got me a deed to prove it!"

The crowd inside the courthouse erupted into a roar. Jim Cooper, the circuit judge who had come all the way from Wichita, pounded his fist on the table. "Quiet, now!" he yelled. "Obie, I know you got a deed. But it appears that three other folks do, too—and all for the same piece of land."

Chester Smith stood up, waving his deed. "This here deed is the only one that's true! I bought that land two full months 'fore them other three ever laid their eyes on it!"

Obie jumped out of his seat, leaning forward with fire in his eyes. "You lyin' cuss, nobody's got a date on their deed. And ain't no witness to say when you bought the land."

Chester turned and matched Obie's holler. "Hank Taylor done sold me that land of his three months 'fore you."

"I thought you just said two?" Obie replied with a mean twist to his voice.

"Well, now I remember it was three."

Obie started for Chester but two men held him back. Judge Cooper pounded his fist into the table once again, this time almost carving a dent with his hand. "Shut up or I'll throw you out of here quicker than wildfire!"

LAUREL DEWEY

"May I say something, Judge?" a smooth voice questioned from the front row.

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVE BECK

Judge Cooper turned his head as if surprised to hear a calm voice amid the chaos. He noted a tall, angular man dressed in a dapper black suit. The gentleman sat comfortably, one leg crossed over the other, with a silver-tipped walking cane elegantly held in his right hand. His steel gray eyes pierced the dim room. "Well, yes, sir, you may," Judge Cooper replied.

The gentleman rose from his seat and turned to address the packed audience. An air of richness surrounded him and he spoke with eloquence. "My name is Nathaniel Barrett and I am in the same predicament as the other three gentlemen. Clearly, we have been the object of a great ruse by Mr. Hank Taylor, God rest his soul."

"I hope he roasts in hell for what he's puttin' us through!" Obie piped up. "I should have known not to buy land from a feller who drank his meals mornin', noon, and night. I done spent my last dollar on that land. Damn Hank Taylor to hell!"

Judge Cooper stood up. "Obie, I'm warning you!" Obie sat down, letting out an angry huff of air as he hit the seat. "Thank you, Mr. Barrett. I guess the only other party to this mess is Mr. Edward Morgan. Mr. Morgan, you've been awful quiet. You got something to say?"

Edward Morgan, seated in the second row next to his wife Emily, looked up toward the judge, not sure what he was expected to say. He cleared his throat nervously and thought for a second. "I reckon Mr. Hank Taylor figured his land must be right fine—so fine that he just couldn't help sellin' it over and over."

The courthouse burst into a loud round of laughter. Edward looked around skittishly, not quite expecting such a reaction from his remark. Emily, her right arm entwined around Edward's, stifled a smile as she squeezed his hand tightly.

> "I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN NOT TO BUY LAND FROM A FELLER WHO DRANK HIS MEALS MORNIN', NOON, AND NIGHT," OBIE PIPED UP.

"Thank you for your opinion, Mr. Morgan," Judge Cooper retorted. "The question still remains, what do we do about a problem that appears to have no reasonable solution, short of drawing sticks."

"If I may, Judge Cooper—" Nathaniel Barrett interrupted.

"Be my guest," Judge Cooper invited.

"As it appears, Mr. Ogden, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Morgan have virtually lost their life savings due to this tragic misunderstanding. In light of this situation, I am prepared to pay each man two and one half times what he paid Mr. Taylor for the land, in exchange for the deed he holds—no matter how false it might be."

A steady rumble of voices now filled the courthouse like a choir. Edward Morgan turned to Emily and, with his eyes, asked for her opinion. She turned her glance toward Nathaniel Barrett, who stood overlooking the crowd. She looked him straight in the eye, trying to see through to his soul. But his steely eyes built an impenetrable wall.

"That's a fine offer, if I do say so myself," Judge Cooper exclaimed. "If I'd bought that land, I'd sure be givin' it some consideration!"

Chester Smith jumped up. "What if we don't want to sell you our land? Then what?"

"Then," Judge Cooper interjected, "you do it the hard way. You men set off from town and the first one to reach the land and claim it is the rightful owner."

Chester Smith yelled out, "You want us to race for land we done bought fair and square?"

"Or sell it to Mr. Barrett," Judge Cooper said, holding firm. "It's your choice."

"That's clear over four hundred miles from here!" Obie cried out with a wail. "You can't expect us to leave Kansas and race to the Colorado Rockies to claim land that is already ours. That ain't right."

"That's the way it will be," Judge Cooper announced, pounding his fist on the table for emphasis. "Make your decision tonight, men. Sell to Mr. Barrett or set off for Colorado. The decision is final. Good day!"

With that statement Judge Cooper stood up, walked through the murmuring crowd, and left the building. Emily Morgan turned her attention to Nathaniel Barrett, who sat down carefully, keeping his face forward and showing no emotion.

The rest of that day and into the evening, Emily and Edward didn't talk much. Throughout their ten-year marriage, they had developed the ability to speak volumes to each other without saying a word. Most of their life on this blank Kansas prairie had not been easy and, more times than not, had proved futile and frustrating. They had tried for many years to have children but, like the barren land that lay around their tiny farm, they were not blessed. Now, at age thirty, Emily felt hopelessness and fear as never before. They had to move onward—toward rich, fertile land.

Only by doing so would she have a chance for seed to grow in her body. This she was sure of beyond all else and for this reason, she could not allow Edward to sell their land to Nathaniel Barrett.

Edward hardly slept that night, his head spinning from the choice he knew he had to make. After buying the land, he had but fifty dollars to his name. That would hardly be enough to get him through the winter after buying seed and supplies for next year's planting. Just the thought of breaking his back behind a plow for another stunted crop was more than he could bear. He remembered back to when he had first seen the land three months before. He had been up in Wyoming to visit an ailing aunt and had cut through the Colorado Territory on his way home. The burgundy mountains had stolen his heart and he knew this was where he had to be. He hadn't questioned Hank Taylor about the deed, nor had he insisted upon a witness to the sale. Instead he trusted, as was his way. Now as he lay in bed thinking, he was sure of only one thing—he wanted to see the sun crest over the mountaintops and set beneath the aspens that spread across the Colorado land he held the deed to. Whether that deed was honest and fair, he did not know.

Judge Cooper stopped by the house the following day to tell Edward that Obie Ogden had sold his land and deed to Barrett for the agreed amount. Chester Smith had stoically refused and was set on pressing onward. So now three men would race for the land. Judge Cooper explained that the three men would leave their respective farms at dawn the following morning, each allowed only their wagon, two oxen, and two horses for the journey.

That day and long into the evening, Edward worried how Emily would take to his being gone. He

THE THREE MEN WOULD RACE FOR THE LAND. JUDGE COOPER EXPLAINED THAT THEY WOULD LEAVE THEIR FARMS AT DAWN THE FOLLOWING MORNING.

looked on her as a gentle flower, hardened only when the circumstances required strong action. His concern continued until predawn the following day when he awoke to find her not in their bed, but outside, dressed in her traveling coat and dress, carefully going over the handmade map Edward had created for their journey. She wound her long, thick brown hair into a single braid that cascaded down to the middle of her back. With Emily's hair pulled off her face, one could easily see the outline of her square, determined face and a jaw that appeared etched in granite more than flesh.

"We best be gettin' on if we're to leave by first light," Emily said.

Edward rounded the corner of the wagon, where Emily stood checking the oxen. "You can't be serious. You can't come with me. It ain't right, Emily."

"We go together or we don't go at all. My heart tells me so and I have to listen to it."

"It's a hard road," he said softly.

"We'll make it," she said, touching his arm lightly. "And we'll be the first. I know it."

When dawn broke across the Kansas prairie, the two set off toward the western sky. They spent their first night beneath the stars just a hundred miles east of the Kansas-Colorado border. Each day they made good time, averaging almost twenty-two miles. The horses and oxen had plenty of grass, the water was plentiful, and the weather stayed clear as they neared the Colorado Territory five days later. They saw no one and wondered what route the other two men had chosen.

On the fifth night, just short of the Colorado Territory, Emily and Edward camped near a river that wound a path through a thick grove of cottonwoods. As they lay on their backs and stared into the night sky, Edward described the land once again, with its gentle slopes of green and carpets of bright color. In her mind, Emily painted the picture and felt as though she was truly there. For the first time in a long while, she felt hope and purpose and a future. They held each other tightly and under the waning moon, they made love.

Since they were a good day ahead of schedule, Emily and Edward decided to spare a few precious hours the following day to tend to chores. Emily resolved to clean Edward's shirts and pants in the river. Even though the sky was clouding up with thick, ink black clouds, the noon air was hot and dry, so the clothes would dry quickly. Because the weight of the clothes proved too much for her, Emily employed one of the horses to transport her load. As she left the campsite leading the horse toward the river, she looked back to where Edward sat securing the rear wagon wheel. He felt her stare and looked up, smiling lovingly.

Down by the river, the hard current was deafening. The heavy barrier of cottonwoods formed a

natural wall between the campsite and the water. As Emily brought out Edward's pants, a large pouch fell from the pocket. Carefully peeling it open, she found their life savings—fifty dollars—wrapped tightly in a thick roll, along with the folded deed to their land. She resolved to scold Edward when she returned to camp for carelessly leaving their precious belongings where they could easily have been lost.

Nearly two hours later, as she finished scrubbing Edward's last shirt, a loud pop erupted in the distance. She stopped and listened but the rush of the river smothered most of the sounds. Then suddenly, four more pops broke through the air, followed by a final one that seemed to linger longer than the others. An uneasy tension gripped her stomach. She threw the shirts and pants across tree branches and turned toward the campsite.

That's when she saw the smoke—thick, black, and billowing toward the cloudy sky. She ran up the steep slope that led toward the camp, her heart beating fast and her mind racing. Several times she slid along the sloppy banks, covering herself in layers of mud.

As she neared the top of the slope where the cottonwoods ended she stopped, shocked by what she saw. The campsite was engulfed in flames. Six men on horseback surrounded the fire, calling out to each other. Emily hunched down beneath the brush, canvassing the scene for Edward but never seeing him. Dark, angry clouds filled the sky as the figures on horseback took on smoky silhouettes. She wanted to run headlong into the flames to find her husband, but something held her back.

One of the men on horseback rode toward where she was hiding and she ducked quickly, flattening her face against the wet earth. The hooves of the man's horse came within several feet of her body but she didn't move a muscle.

ONE OF THE MEN ON HORSEBACK RODE TOWARD WHERE EMILY WAS HIDING AND SHE DUCKED QUICKLY, FLATTENING HER FACE AGAINST THE WET EARTH.

His gruff voice echoed through the black air. "She ain't here, boss!" The horse's hooves moved quickly away from where she hid. Using only her arms, she pushed herself gradually down the wet embankment and huddled beneath a tall cottonwood. She stayed there, staring straight ahead, until the sun set over the far hills.

Emily decided to make her way up the slope and into the campsite to find her husband, although she knew he was dead. If they were waiting for her, she resolved, she would face their guns without fear and trace the faces of her killers in her mind before she died. The campsite was still smoldering as she walked across the burnt grass. The wagon stood like a hollow shell against the orange sky. The oxen, as well as the one horse she had left behind, had been shot dead. Black rubble lay at each footstep, cracking with heat and spewing forth white smoke. Tossed to the side, she found one of her husband's wide-brimmed hats, singed only on the edges. She picked it up and held it to her heart as her body went numb. She surveyed the area for intruders, but heard and saw nothing.

Then her eye caught the sparkle of a gold ring, buried partially under the coal black debris. She moved toward it, then stopped when she realized it was still attached to Edward's hand. Her breath caught in her throat. She had to get away. Quickly, she trudged back to the river, where the clothes hung from the cottonwoods and the horse stood quietly.

Emily wasn't sure how long she knelt by the water's edge, rocking to and fro with Edward's hat clutched to her chest. All she knew was that the sun became hot and rose high above, casting her reflection upon the water, which was now calm. She looked into it at her face, caked with layers of mud that had dried and left the impression of an unkempt beard. They were looking for her and when they found her, they would kill her. This she knew as clear as anything. As she gazed into the water at her muddy complexion, a thought crossed her mind. For now, it was the only way she knew of to escape.

Using a sharp knife she found in a small pack attached to the horse's saddle, she sliced off her hair until her brown locks measured only a couple inches. She layered another thick heap of mud across her face and forehead, wiping the excess through her hair. She removed her dress and donned several of Edward's shirts to hide her chest, then pulled on his trousers. Fitting his hat snugly on her head and pulling it tightly over her ears, she returned her glance to the river's reflection. It would never work, she reasoned. They were certain to find her, but there was no going back. All she had left in the world lay in front of her. She resolved to be

the first one to set foot on the land—or die trying.

As the noon sun pierced the cloudy sky, Emily Morgan made her way into the Colorado Territory. She rode her sorrel along the banks of the Snake River, careful to stay within the sparse patches of trees and shrubs. The men who had killed her husband were somewhere out there, and they knew she was alive. Her only hope was that her manly dress and disguise would keep them at bay long enough for her to get ahead and move closer to the land she was determined to claim as her own.

Ever since the murder of Edward the day before, Emily had remained strangely calm—focused ahead and numb. The clop of her horse's hooves trudging along the banks of the river matched the rhythm of her heart. She looked around furtively, expecting to see someone jump from the trees, but all stayed silent and calm.

She reached into her shirt pocket and pulled out the homemade map Edward had made for their journey. Keeping one eye on the scene and one on the map, she realized she had to move off the Snake and onto higher ground if she was to make it to the land first. Although she had not seen either Nathaniel Barrett or Chester Smith since the start of the journey, she knew they could not be far in front of or behind her.

She still could not figure out why Nathaniel Barrett wanted the land so badly. With his manicured fingernails and elegant, silver-tipped walking cane, he did not seem the kind of man who would be eager to set up a homestead in the untamed Colorado Territory.

But she could not concern herself with Barrett at the moment. She had to lay plenty of miles between herself and whoever was after her. Pulling her husband's shirt collar high around her neck and fitting his hat lower on her forehead, she gave her horse a stiff kick in the ribs and moved up toward the open land. She rode hard and heavy until the sun dipped beneath the far mountains.

EMILY FOUND TWO PIECES OF JERKY AND A HANDFUL OF WOODEN MATCHES. BESIDES THE KNIFE, THESE WERE HER SOLE POSSESSIONS.

That night, she camped near a grove of cottonwoods. A slow creek about a hundred feet beyond served as the only water from which Emily and her horse could drink. Darkness would come soon and she had to find food. Opening the horse's leather pack where the homemade map was stored, she found the last two pieces of jerky and a handful of wooden matches. Besides the knife she had used to cut her hair, these were her sole possessions. Of course, there was the deed to the land and the fifty dollars—the only two things standing between herself and poverty.

The wind picked up with a sudden chill as the sun disappeared beneath the horizon. She recalled Edward once telling her that sometimes a fellow could fish in shallow water if he had a good eye, a fast hand, and a sharp knife. So she made her way down to the creek and peered into the dark blue water, straining to see something in the waning light. With knife in hand, she strode tentatively into the slow current and looked for signs of a fish. Nothing. "God, please," she heard herself whisper as she made her way through the water. Still, nothing. Then, from behind her, she heard a sloppy flop in the water. She turned quickly and saw the murky outline of a small trout feeding on the undergrowth. She didn't want to move her feet for fear of scaring it away. So awkwardly, she turned her body, holding the knife directly above the fish. She plunged the knife into the water, missing the fish by inches. The quick move threw her off balance and she fell sideways into the creek, soaking herself from head to toe.

Wearily, she made her way out of the water and onto the muddy shoulder that framed the creek. Lying there staring at the stars and the black, endless sky, she was transported back to the previous evening where she had lain, facedown in the mud, while men had killed her husband and burned their wagon. The numbness that had engulfed her body suddenly wore off and she started shaking violently—partly from the cold, but mostly from the memory. She screamed out for her husband, beating the soft ground with her fists, and cried uncontrollably for what seemed like an eternity. The sudden realization that she was completely and utterly alone was staggering. There would be no one to come to her aid, no one to pick her up, no one to feed her, no one to hold her. She could lie on the muddy ground and wait to die and when she did, no one would mourn her or bury her or know her name. The more these thoughts ran through her head, the madder she got. She jumped to her feet and walked back to camp.

Beneath the patch of trees, Emily dug a shallow hole using the knife and her bare hands, layering the earth with dried leaves. Curling her soaked body into the hole, she covered herself with several layers of leaves until she wore the chill off her bones. She allowed herself only one piece of jerky before drifting off to sleep.

The rising sun warmed her face as Emily awoke to a clear day. Tipping the wide brim of her hat, she looked around, searching for any sign of life. There was nothing, except for the sound of the distant creek and the occasional snap of a grasshopper. She moved cautiously to the creek for a morning drink. The mud she had caked on her face to camouflage her features was cracked and wearing off so she quickly slapped on another thick layer, this time covering her neck. Through the mud, she noticed a small patch of wild onions and turnips growing in the soggy marsh. She pulled them up quickly, shoving every inch in her mouth, mud and all. When she had pulled the last one from the ground, she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and continued up the bank toward her horse.

She rode hard that day, her thoughts focused on Chester Smith and Nathaniel Barrett. Although she didn't want to believe it, she entertained the notion that one of them could have been responsible for her husband's death. Greed, she thought, was an unrelenting beast, capable of taking a man's life for a piece of earth. But which one, if either, had done the deed? Chester Smith never had liked Edward. There had been no harsh words—it was simply a case of two men who didn't get on with each other. But could Chester have it in him to kill Edward? Emily pounded her horse harder through the high prairie brush.

Nathaniel Barrett. He wanted the land—there was no doubt of that. But was this dignified gentleman capable of committing murder? She had seen no one that night—only heard the gruff voice of one man who she could never identify. Perhaps, she thought, it was neither Chester nor Nathaniel. Perhaps it was a band of outlaws who knew nothing of any land. Either way, the fact remained that there was someone out there who wanted her dead.

A DOG ROUNDED THE CORNER OF THE HOUSE, BARKING ANGRILY. IT CLIPPED AT THE HOOVES OF EMILY'S HORSE, CAUSING THE SORREL TO PANIC.

By twilight, Emily had covered a rough thirty miles. She was cold, tired, and hungry, and longed for the comforts of home. She pulled her horse to a halt as the scent of burning piñon swept the night air. The aroma led her to a small cabin with flickering light emanating from the front window. She stopped her horse suddenly, realizing her appearance. If she were to continue in the guise of a man, she reasoned she would have to talk and act like one. She could tuck her chin into her chest, lower her hat, affect a gruff, deep voice, mimic her husband's walk—all this she promised to do as she rode closer to the homestead. Her hands, though, might give her away. The long, angular fingers would never be found on a man, so she resolved to tuck them deep into her pockets.

No sooner had she come within shouting distance of the house than a dog rounded the far corner, eyes narrowed and barking angrily. The dog clipped at the hooves of Emily's horse, causing the sorrel to jerk from panic. The front door of the house swung open and a woman appeared, aiming a Winchester dead center on Emily. Emily immediately tucked her chin close to her chest and raised her hands.

"Don't shoot!" Emily said, lowering her voice.

The dog continued to nip at the horse's hooves.

"What do you want?" the woman replied angrily, moving her bony frame forward and pulling back the hammer.

"Please—I don't mean you no harm. Call off the dog, would you?"

"I said, what do you want?!" The woman insisted as she took a step closer toward Emily, who tried to hide her face as much as possible.

"I need some food, ma'am."

"You get outta here, you hear me?! My husband—he be comin' home soon. You hear?"

Emily glanced at her hands, realizing they might give her away. She started to lower them as she pleaded, "Ma'am, I ain't eaten in two days. I can't go on . . ."

"Don't you lower them hands!" the woman snarled.

Emily quickly held her hands where the woman could see them. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw someone move near the door. A girl, no more than ten years old, peeked around the corner and watched every move. Emily smiled and spoke out, "Hey, there."

The woman turned toward the door and angrily shouted, "You get back, girl."

The little girl ducked behind

the door, but without her mother knowing, she stole a look from the front window.

"Ma'am," Emily continued, trying to reason with the woman. "I ain't gonna cause you no grief. All's I need is a place to rest and some food and I'll be out of here by dawn. I promise."

The woman studied Emily's face. She was certain that any moment this angry, world-beaten soul would figure out who she really was, but the woman said nothing. She lowered the rifle and wiped her brow with the back of her sleeve. Her voice was still rough as she spoke to Emily. "I got me a pile of wood in the barn that needs cuttin'. You slice it good for me and stack it right and I'll give you a bowl of stew. When you're done, you sleep in the barn with your horse and don't you come near my house or my husband'll kill you. You hear me, mister?"

Emily swallowed hard as she tucked her hands into her pockets. "Yes, ma'am."

Emily led her horse into the barn where she found bales of hay covered with wood. An ax lay carelessly on the barn floor, its handle covered with dung and dirt. She hoisted each log atop the sturdiest hay bale and swung with all her might until she cracked the wood into four thin pieces. Her bare hands ached from the pressure of the ax handle. Two hours later, her hands puckered with blisters, she quartered the last log and placed the pieces in a neat pile. Tossing the ax into the loose hay, she turned on her heels just in time to see the little girl standing at the barn door with a bowl of stew cradled in her hands.

Emily pulled her hat lower on her forehead and tucked her hands into her pockets. With the same low, manly voice, she spoke. "How long you been starin' at me?"

"I don't know," the girl replied.

EMILY SAW WHAT SHE THOUGHT WAS A TRAIL OF RED ANTS ON CHESTER'S NECK. SHE LOOKED CLOSER AND REALIZED IT WAS A STREAM OF BLOOD.

Emily tried to avoid the girl's stare as she moved toward the pile of wood. "I done like your ma said. Cut it real thin and easy to carry. Your Pa should approve."

"Pa's dead."

Emily looked up at the girl, taken aback. "I'm right sorry, honey."

"Yeah. Here's your stew. I warmed it up. Don't tell Ma."

"Thank you."

The girl moved closer and set the bowl on a hay bale. She cocked her head toward the hay-loft, then looked straight into Emily's eyes. "What kind of trouble you in?"

Emily self-consciously turned away and scuffed the ground with her boot. "No trouble. Just passin' through. A man can do that, can't he?"

The girl tipped her head and moved closer until she reached Emily's side. She clasped her small fingers around Emily's arm and gently pulled her hand out of the pocket, then moved to a large wooden bin where horse tack and farm equipment was stored. She pulled out a large, work-beaten pair of gloves and returned to Emily's side. Without saying a word, she slipped the gloves into one of Emily's pockets, then turned and walked toward the barn door. "Better eat your stew 'fore it gets cold." And without turning back, she left.

Emily awoke at dawn to slivers of morning light sifting down through the cracks of the barn. A man's long overcoat covered her. In its pocket were three biscuits and two large pieces of pemmican. She quickly put on the coat and saddled her horse, leading him quietly past the dimly lit homestead. Something made her turn her head back to the house. Through the morning shadows, she saw the girl peering out from the front window. Although Emily could not be sure, she thought she saw her smile.

With renewed strength, Emily pushed her horse through the yellow grass that dotted the Colorado landscape. She was imbued with fresh determination to reach her land. The day was clear and travel was fast—Emily logged a full forty miles from dawn to dusk. She rationed herself only one biscuit and a piece of pemmican and was ready to stop for the night and enjoy the remaining morsels when she saw the curl of smoke from a campfire. So as not to attract attention, she tied her horse to a tree and moved softly toward the camp, which was hidden within a thicket of scrub oak. As she crawled closer to the campsite, the pop and crack of the fire broke through the silence. She ducked behind a curtain of green overgrowth and peeked through the leaves. A man sat with his back to her, absolutely still. A neat bundle of provisions sat next to him, along with his horse, which was tethered to a tree. The scene was that of peace, and yet, something was very wrong.

Emily eyed the horse and noted a distinct marking on his right flank. The only man she knew who had a horse with that mark was Chester Smith. Emily sank

into the bushes and wondered what to do next. Her first instinct was to return to her horse and continue forward, placing as much distance as she could between herself and Chester. She turned back to where he sat and saw what she thought was a trail of red ants working their way down his neck. She looked closer and realized it was a stream of blood. Emily scanned the area with her eyes, intent on picking out any intruders that could be lying in wait. She hesitated but saw nothing, so she approached him.

She moved around Chester's body and cautiously looked at him. Half of his face was shot off, the other half left perfectly intact. Emily spotted his six-shooter tucked tightly in his pants, and without hesitating, she pulled it out. She found a handful of bullets in his pocket, which she stuffed in her trousers. Working as fast as she could, she grabbed two grub sacks and a neatly tied bedroll. She started back toward her horse when she heard the sound of branches cracking. She threw down everything but the gun, which she held out at arm's length. She spun around in a quick circle, ready to shoot the first thing that moved.

Nothing.

She waited for another sound, finger moist against the trigger, but all fell silent once again. With her head up and taking careful steps, she gathered up the grub sacks and bedroll and ran to her horse. She rode into the tall grass, staying low in the saddle until she cleared the farthest hill.

What Emily did not know was that a lone figure on horseback never lost sight of her.

Emily tore through the open land, churning pockets of prairie grass as she dug her horse's hooves deeper into the ground. The moon was full and the flat expanse of Colorado range land took on an eerie cast as trees and brush stretched their warped shadows across the dirt. An acrid smell filled the air; Emily feared it was the devil himself rising from the ashes. Her hands grasped the reins so tightly that she left deep indentations in her gloves. For what seemed like days, but was only hours, she stared straight ahead, eyes focused on the blue-black horizon, and rode hard until finally her horse gave out.

> THE FLASK WAS HALF FULL OF FULL-GRAIN ALCOHOL— THE KIND USED FOR SEDATING AND FORGETTING. EMILY HAD NEVER SMELLED ANYTHING SO VILE.

She pulled against the reins and slowed to a halt. Judging by the moon's slant in the sky, she could tell it was still hours before dawn and so she searched for a safe place to hide. She followed the sound of a creek and tied her sorrel to a branch. She had no idea where she was or what direction she had traveled. Furthermore, she felt as though she'd awakened from a deep sleep and couldn't remember anything between the time of seeing Chester's face and stopping her horse. This was what it was like, she decided, to go insane. The thought crossed her mind that she may have backtracked and was not only farther from her destination, but perhaps closer to those who were trying to kill her. Emily cursed the darkness as she stood up, trying to see through the blackness. But it was useless. She withdrew the revolver she had taken from Chester and fell to her knees, collapsing on the soft dirt. With one finger resting against the trigger, she fell fast asleep.

A light rain began to fall as the sun inched above the flat range land. The soft pelt of raindrops jerked Emily awake. She jumped to her feet and scanned the area, not sure if she was still alone. Silence. To the east lay the vast expanse of Colorado flat land; to the west rose the mountain ranges that brushed the sky with their snowcapped crowns. She retraced the direction she had ridden the previous evening and felt assured that she had been moving westward instead of backtracking.

Emily led her horse to a creek where they both gulped the cold water. All the while, Emily carefully surveyed the surrounding area for intruders, her gun firmly clasped in her right hand. Never did she let her defenses down, even as she secured her horse and untied the two grub sacks she had taken from Chester's camp the previous night. Inside the first grub sack, she found half a loaf of hard bread, a slab of bacon, a pound of pemmican, a woolen shirt, a blanket, and a pouch full of bullets. She sat back, feeling rich for the first time in many days. Quickly, she opened the second grub sack. There was more food, a large flask of whiskey, another pouch of bullets, a hunting knife, a Colt revolver, about twenty feet of strong rope, and another small pouch, which held twenty-seven dollars. She laid the bounty on the grass and stared at it for a long minute. These were not two sacks belonging to one

man. One must have belonged to Chester, but the other?

Who had he been with? she wondered. It wasn't like Chester to take on company, especially when his journey was so important and time was of the essence. Why take on someone who might slow you down, or worse, cause you harm in a drunken rage? There was the flask—half full, she discovered after uncorking it. Chester drank, but never from a flask. The man who killed Chester must be the same one who belonged to the grub sack that held the flask. And perhaps he was the man who killed her husband. But why would he leave the sack behind after killing Chester? And was he alone? There had been more men that fateful night than one.

Emily took another look at the flask. The smell was of full-grain alcohol—the kind used for sedating and forgetting. She had never smelled anything so vile. She smelled it again and tipped the flask so that the liquid hovered around the neck. With only slight hesitation, she dipped her finger into the flask, swished it around, and then sucked the alcohol off. She waited for something to happen, but she felt nothing, so she fastened her mouth around the flask and took a swig that turned into a gulp. In seconds, the fire of the alcohol exploded inside her body. She threw down the flask and fell to the ground, pounding the dirt with her fist as though that would put out the flame. She rolled over, coughing great fits of fury, quite sure she would die. The heat subsided and a lightness engulfed her head which, in turn, made her feel as though she was floating. A dull calmness came over her as she lay in the dirt, completely oblivious to her surroundings.

If she had been more aware, she would have seen the tall man on horseback who waited and watched from the undergrowth less than a hundred feet away.

FROM HER PERCH, EMILY COULD SEE A LONE WOMAN SEATED BY THE CAMPFIRE, READING A BOOK. A CONESTOGA WAGON SAT NEARBY.

After an hour in this stupor, she got up, flung the sacks across her saddle, and continued her journey westward. As she studied the map Edward had drawn, she realized that if she rode hard, there was no reason she couldn't make it to the county land office in the space of two and a half days. According to the map, the land office lay in Calver County, in a small town named Jett. The first person with deed in hand to arrive at that office would sign the ledger and own the land.

She lost valuable time climbing passes, but regained it when she let her horse run down the embankments and flat meadows that lay between the cavernous mountains. At one point she descended into a blue-green landscape, still dotted with patches of late-season snow, with plenty of grass and a stream cutting through. She rested her horse and took time to eat. Her head was still numb from the alcohol and her stomach was not welcoming much food, so she portioned out only small morsels of the bread and pemmican. The slit of land where she sat was surrounded on all sides by towering, curved rock formations that looked like two palms coming together in prayer. Emily felt as though she was the first person on Earth ever to see this place. About thirty feet in front of her, a fat prairie dog emerged from his hole and sat up, completely still and transfixed. She stared at him, entertaining the notion that he was duly amazed at her attempt at a male disguise. She took the opportunity to practice her version of a deep-voiced male, repeating "hello," and "yes, ma'am." The scene made her chuckle and she feared the alcohol was still playing tricks. The prairie dog, still motionless as a statue, remained intent. Emily broke off the hard crust of bread and tossed it toward the animal, missing him by several feet. He still didn't move and she thought him a bit stupid. So she walked over to where the crust lay and tossed it closer to him. As she turned, she noted fresh hoofprints in the dry dirt. Her lighthearted moment was quickly forgotten as she carefully turned a full circle, eyes pinned to the very wisp of movement. The prairie dog quickly sank back into his hole, causing her to jerk around, ready to draw her revolver. She swallowed hard as she noticed something small and shiny lying near the edge of the prairie dog's home. She bent down and picked up what looked at first to be a plain silver thimble. On second glance, it was too large to be a thimble, but too small to be a cup. The flat bottom of the object had been scratched to the point of roughness—as though someone had dragged it mercilessly across the ground. There wasn't much dirt or dust on the surface of it, which made Emily think that it hadn't been sitting there for long. She stuffed it into her shirt pocket, got back on her horse, and rode on.

Feeling that she was not alone, Emily decided to stay clear of open space and ride alongside the

low land where the shroud of bushes and low-hanging trees might protect her. The only problem was that, in doing so, she had to make two turns that took her completely off her mapped trail. By nightfall, she worried she had traveled too far from the main trail and that getting back on it could prove difficult. Although she was headed in the right direction, she feared she might be so far off course that she would pass the tiny town of Jett and never know it.

As the sun set, her concerns grew. She moved back up onto the open land, cautiously riding her horse around the many jagged rocks that spurted from the earth. The cloudy night sky sheltered the full moon, making travel difficult at best. To continue at this rate could only prove fruitless and possibly set her farther off course. Just as she was about to give up for the evening, she saw the flickering orange light of a large campfire glowing in the distance. She jumped from her horse and drew her gun. Tethering her sorrel to an oak, she carefully moved closer to the campsite.

The camp was nestled in a circle of sagebrush and willow trees. From her perch along the backside of the camp, Emily could see a lone woman seated by the campfire, reading a book. She looked to be around forty; her hair was pulled neatly into a tight bun. Her dress, a sturdy brown calico, showed off her strong, tall frame. A Conestoga wagon sat nearby, weather-beaten from what looked to have been a long journey. A canvas tent was propped near the wagon with its flaps open. Emily could see that no one was inside. Careful not to make any noise, she returned to her horse. She caked another layer of dirt and mud across her face and pulled her hat low across her forehead. Clearing her throat, she practiced her manly voice. Once satisfied, she led her horse toward the camp, this time making plenty of noise to announce her arrival.

"WHEN YOU MEET SOMEONE ON THE TRAIL," THE WOMAN SAID, "YOU LOOK THEM STRAIGHT IN THE EYE AND YOU CAN SEE WHAT THEY WANT."

The woman turned and stood, looking in Emily's direction. "George?" she said.

"No, ma'am," Emily assured, her voice cracking slightly. "I'm just passin' through and was in need of some direction."

The woman squinted through the darkness. "Come closer where I can see you," she said.

Emily moved into the camp, tying her horse to a tree and tipping her hat at the woman. "Evenin', ma'am. I'm headin' toward the town of Jett and I reckon I may be off course. Think you could help me?" The woman stared at Emily for what seemed an eternity. Emily became increasingly nervous and lowered her head, trying to hide her features as much as possible. When the woman continued to stare, Emily spoke up again, "Ma'am?"

"Yes, of course. Please, have a seat, would you?" she said.

"Oh, no, I need to be pushin' on."

"Please, I could use the company. I insist."

There was something in her voice that made Emily realize she would get no information from her until she did as she was told. So, with hands dug deep in her coat pocket, she sat at the farthest point possible from the woman.

"I have some stew left over from supper."

"Oh, no, ma'am, that's not . . ."

The woman held out a wooden bowl of stew to Emily. Reluctantly, she got up and took hold of the bowl. The entire time the woman never lost sight of Emily's eyes. Tipping her hat in the woman's direction, Emily said a muffled "thank-you" and returned to her seat.

"My husband, George, has been out all day tracking the trail. He said not to worry. But of course, I do. How's the stew?"

"Real good. Thank you, ma'am," Emily answered, feeling uncomfortable.

"We're heading to Marshall City. You said you were on your way to Jett? What takes you there?"

"Business, ma'am."

"George and I started out in Ohio. Including today, we will have been on the trail for almost two and a half months. How long have you been traveling?"

"Don't reckon I know exactly. It's been a while."

"The days do tend to blend into each other, don't they?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"When George told me of his plans to come West, I don't believe I truly understood what I was getting involved in. We must have traveled the trail for weeks before the whole thing sank in. I remember one day, I was sitting by the fire in the middle of nowhere, and I didn't know how we had gotten there. I know that sounds quite odd, but it was as though I had suddenly awakened and realized that we were really doing this. Forging ahead, as it were. More stew?"

"No, ma'am."

"I probably sound quite mad to you, don't I?"

"No, ma'am."

"I'm quite sane, to be honest. This land requires people to have all their senses if they're to be successful. Do you find that you think a lot out here?"

"I reckon," Emily said, intrigued by the woman, and yet still not sure.

"I've thought deeply about more things in these past months than ever before. You start this journey one kind of person and end it completely different. It's absolutely impossible, I've decided, to remain the same. I think it has to do with coming face-to-face with not just the land, but with yourself. Don't you agree?"

Emily placed the bowl next to her as she eyed the woman carefully. "I hadn't really thought on it."

"Well, I have. You see yourself not as the person you've always projected but the one that's buried deeply inside. And to meet yourself like that is like seeing the face of God. You're never the same again because you've seen too much and thought things you never dreamed before." The woman leaned forward and spoke in a hushed tone. "One pays more attention out here. When you meet someone on the trail, you look them straight in the eye. And if you're a good study, you can see what they want, where they've been, and sometimes where they're going. What's that they say—'The eyes are the windows to the soul.' "

"Yes, ma'am," Emily whispered. "The windows to the soul." Emily thought back to the first day in the makeshift courthouse in Kansas when the circuit judge had come to sort out the land claim. She recalled the precise moment Nathaniel Barrett had risen from his seat with his dashing demeanor and silver-tipped cane.

SOMETHING IN THE INTRUDER'S VOICE SHOOK EMILY OUT OF HER RAGE. STILL, SHE HELD HIM FIRMLY. "WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWIN' ME?" SHE ASKED.

She had looked into his eyes that day and wondered. . . .

"You," the woman said, forcing Emily out of her trance. "I look into your eyes and I see kindness. But I also see someone with a . . . mission? A single-minded goal?"

"Ma'am?"

"I find it so intriguing to meet two people with the same determination in their eyes in the space of a single day. Of course, the only difference is that his eyes also carried hate and, I should have to say, evil intent."

Emily started shaking, her lower lip twitching with fear. She spoke, but this time without the deep male voice. "What did he say?"

"He said he was looking for someone, but wouldn't give a name or even a description. Just said it was someone suspicious. I told him and his men that I had indeed seen someone fitting that exact description only an hour before, headed into those steep hills, and that if they hurried, they might catch up to him. He thanked me and followed my directions. I've got that kind face, you know. It's so honest and convincing—to men, that is. I can tell a man almost anything and he'll believe me, even when it's absolutely untrue."

"Why would you do that?"

"Oh, one of those feelings, I suppose. I just knew that whoever he was looking for needed to be as far away from him as possible. I imagine he'll give up the search once they reach the peak, which is impassible. But that will take most of one day. Enough time for one to get to Jett safely. From this trail, it's only a day and a half from here, you know.

Emily stood up. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Whatever for?" the woman said, cocking her head.

Emily smiled as she untied her horse and led him onto the trail.

She rode all night but didn't force her horse beyond a slow trot. By morning, she found herself situated upon a wide expanse of grassland, broken by narrow hillsides and lofty mountains. Emily kept her head low, her chin pressed against her chest. Still, she could see all the way around her, thanks to the wide brim camouflage of her hat. All was silent until noon when, out of the corner of her eye, she spotted a lone figure high above her on a bluff, paralleling her travel. Her heart started to beat faster, until she thought it would pop from her chest. She stopped her horse and he followed suit. She started again, riding into a trot, and he matched the speed. She thought back to the night before when the woman said that people saw themselves for who they truly were out here. She could race her horse to Jett, but she was tired of running and ducking for cover. An overwhelming anger took hold of her and she started to feel a burning heat rising up inside her. She spotted a creek in the distance that lay in the open, alongside a bank of cottonwoods. She trotted

to it, tethered her horse, and brought out the long rope from the grub sack.

Forty minutes later she sat hunched at the edge of the creek, her head buried in her chest and her back toward anyone who approached. The sound of another horse snorting could be heard, but she didn't move. Within seconds, the snap of kindling underfoot pierced the silence. Still, she made no move. The footsteps edged closer and Emily determined they were no more than thirty feet above her where the cottonwoods joined before descending the bank. There was a moment of silence and then the sound of footsteps again. Emily counted to five in her head. When she reached five she uncovered the rope, which was tied to one of the cottonwoods. With one hard jerk she sprang the rope taut, catching the intruder on the knees and knocking him facedown in the dirt. Without a moment's hesitation Emily turned around, gun in hand, and jumped onto his back. She dug one foot square between his shoulder blades, held his neck against the dirt with her left hand, and pressed her revolver against his temple. She could feel the burn of anger overwhelm her as she pulled back the hammer on the gun.

"No! No!" he screamed, spitting back the mud from the creek bank.

"Shut up!" she screamed, slamming her boot heel into his kidney.

"Wait!"

"I said, shut up!" she said, forcing the tip of the revolver into his mouth. She leaned close to his ear and whispered. "I want you to suffer for what you did."

The man's eyes widened. "Please," he begged, almost inaudibly. "Please . . ."

Emily withdrew the gun from his mouth and dug it into his cheek. "Maybe I'll shoot your face off, like you did to Chester."

As Emily looked around at the pale painted buildings, she realized how long it had been since she had seen a town.

"No—my name's Joe. Joe Carter. I didn't do it. You've got the wrong man. I swear!"

Something in his voice shook Emily out of her rage. Still, she held his head firmly against the dirt. "Then why are you followin' me?!"

"You took my grub sack. It's all I got left. Please. I just want it back and I'll leave. You can keep the food. I just need the gun and the money. Twenty-seven dollars, that's all. Please. . . ."

Emily kept a firm hold but pulled the gun away from his head. "You kill Chester?"

"No, but I know who did. And he wants a piece of me now 'cause I know."

"Know what?"

"Everything."

Emily thought for a second. "I'm gonna turn you over real careful. But you make one move and I swear I'll kill you." She released her hold on him and moved off his body, but she kept the revolver poised at his chest as he sat up and stared at her. "Go on. Talk."

"I met up with him on the trail. I just wanted some company. But I should have known better. You couldn't tell from lookin' at him, though. He dressed like a gentleman. Real dapper and he talked real educated."

"Who? What's his name?"

"I only know his last name. Barrett."

"Barrett," Emily repeated. "How long were you with him?"

"Not long. I didn't want no part of what he was doin'."

"Which was?"

"Killin'. Cold-blooded killin'."

"Were you with him. . . ." Emily's voice started to crack. "Were you with him when he killed a man just outside of Colorado Territory?"

"No. But he told about it."

"He told you?"

"He was drunk. He'd been drinkin' the pure grain I carry in that flask. Hell, I only use that when I'm hurtin'. He swigged it back like water. That stuff'll drag the truth out of your body and I reckon it sure done that. He told me he had a deed to a piece of prime Colorado land and no one was gonna take it away from him. He bragged about shootin' a man in the back and then burnin' his wagon. Said it was the prettiest thing he'd ever seen—everything on fire and all. Said he'd tried to find the man's wife, but she was gone. Said he was sorry he couldn't look at her face when she saw what he'd done. When I heard that, I knew I'd set myself up in a right good fix. But I played along like I didn't care, so he and his boys would think I was one of them. The next day, when he sobered up, he recalled what he'd told me and I told him again that I didn't care, though it made me sick inside to say it. He said there was one more they was after and he was gonna do me a favor. He was gonna let me kill him. I told him all right, but inside, there's no way I would do it. When we come up on the feller, Chester, he told me to ride in and do it. I nodded and started off, but before I got to the camp, I made a sharp turn and tried to ride away. He

caught on to what I was doin' and he and his men came after me. I turned my horse and headed back into Chester's camp, and Barrett and his boys followed. Barrett took a clean shot at Chester's face 'fore he even knew what hit him. I panicked and in all the mess, my grub sack came loose and fell on the ground. I don't know how I got out of there alive. I just remember Barrett taking a shot at me and me ducking and riding hell-bent into the dark. I took cover in a cave, and when I reckoned it was safe, I went back to fetch my grub sack, but you was takin' it. I didn't know if you was one of them, so I just followed you. That's the God's truth."

Emily lowered her revolver and sank to the ground. "Why so much killin' in the name of the land?"

"Well, as he said it, it ain't what's *on* the land, it's what's *in* it."

"What?"

"Silver. That's the joke, he said. Everybody wants to put cows or corn or whatever on the land when the real fortune's in the rocks."

Emily took her hat off and leaned closer to Joe. "Listen to me. My name is Emily Morgan. Mr. Barrett didn't get to see my face when I found Edward, but he will see it when he meets me at the land office in Jett with my name at the top of the ledger. And with your testimony, I will avenge my husband's death."

Joe looked at Emily, not quite sure what to do. "Oh, dear God. I had no idea. You. . . ."

"We need to hurry. We're only a half day away if we ride hard." Joe staggered to his feet as Emily drew the rope into a tight bundle. She placed it in his grub sack and tossed the sack to him. "Come on!" she urged.

"No. I can't go with you. He'll kill me, don't you see?"

"I need you to go with me," Emily demanded. "I can't prove anything without your testimony."

EMILY FROZE IN HER TRACKS, SUDDENLY AWARE THAT DOTTY WAS COMPLETELY TAKEN IN BY HER DISGUISE. THIS CHARADE HAD GONE TOO FAR.

"I'm sorry for your situation, but I'm as innocent as you are. I'd like to help you, honest I would, but I got a future waitin' on me. I got me a job in Marshall—ranch foreman."

With that, Joe slung his grub sack over his shoulder and climbed up the bank towards his horse. Emily watched him go, not believing what she was seeing. Joe got on his horse and stole one more look at Emily, who stood motionless. "I'm sorry, ma'am. Truly sorry," he said as he gave his horse a stiff kick and rode off.

Emily turned toward her sorrel. She could feel the anger welling up again. "We're just burnin' daylight, aren't we?" she said out loud with no trace of emotion in her voice. She swung her body onto her horse and galloped up the creek bank onto the open land. As the sun rose the next morning, she crested a ridge and looked down. There before her lay the town of Jett.

The dirt spit curls of dust around her horse's hooves as Emily trotted down the main street of Jett. In the predawn light, she was alone except for the milk wagon making its morning rounds. As she looked around at the pale painted buildings, Emily realized how long it had been since she had seen a town. Three weeks of her life had passed by—and for two of them, she had been completely on her own. She found the land office near the edge of town. Tethering her horse to the rail, she looked around for any sign of life. Nothing. Her back ached from too many nights sleeping on the hard ground, and weariness had finally set in. Her throat felt raw from swallowing weeks of prairie dust. She tried to cough it off her chest, but it stuck in her throat like gravel. Exhausted, she sank to the boardwalk and rested her head against the tethering post.

She awoke to the sound of footsteps and keys jingling. A young man no older than twenty approached her. "Can I help you?" he asked, peering down at her.

Still half asleep, Emily started to speak. The dust in her throat made her voice husky, even though she was not trying to sound like a man. "I got a deed to Hank Taylor's land and I'm here to sign the ledger. Am I the first?"

The man tossed his keys back and forth in search of the one that fit the lock. "How's that?"

"Am I the first one here?"

The man unlocked the door and shoved it open. Emily followed. "I don't know." He rounded the counter and pulled out a large brown leather ledger. "Been gone a few days fishin'." He brushed his index finger across the pages, clucking his tongue. "Hank Taylor's property, you say?"

"Yes, sir," Emily answered, her patience growing thin.

"Well, I do believe you are the first to arrive. May I see the deed?"

Emily pulled the deed from her shirt pocket, where it had been

since the night her husband had been killed. She unfolded the paper, flattening it against the counter and blowing the trail dust from the creases.

The man looked at the weather-worn paper, a slight smile crossing his face. "You won't mind if I take a closer look at this, will you?"

"No, sir," Emily answered, a bit uneasy.

The young man took the paper closer to the window and squinted at the writing as if he were deciphering a foreign language. He turned to Emily, who looked him straight in the eye. After a sizable amount of time, he walked back toward the counter, tapping his finger several times on the deed. "This is a real fine piece of land Hank Taylor had. Lots of water, good grass. You can set yourself up with a real nice future."

Emily let out a long breath. "Thank you."

The man swung the ledger book around and handed Emily the pen. "Just sign the ledger with the name. Oh, and make sure it's exactly the way it's written on the deed. The land office is mighty picky about that sort of thing."

Emily looked at the deed, then back toward the young man. "Exactly?"

"Exactly."

"Yes, sir."

She signed the ledger and the man handed her the note to the land, stamped and dated. "I can have one of the boys take you out and show it to you."

"Thank you."

"They won't be in for an hour yet. You come back about nine o'clock."

"Yes, sir." Emily turned and walked outside, still staring at the note in her hand. She looked into the bright blue Colorado sky and whispered, "We did it, Edward. We made it." She felt a catch in her throat but held back the tears. Looking down at herself, she realized what a sight she must be to others. Dirt, mud, sweat, and dust were etched into every fold of her skin. She turned back to the young man in the land office. "Excuse me. Where can I get a room to rest and clean up?"

> BARRETT WALKED INTO THE LAND OFFICE, PULLING THE DEED FROM HIS COAT POCKET. "I BELIEVE THERE IS A PIECE OF LAND THAT GOES WITH THIS DEED."

"Hotel's filled up with cattlemen. Maybe the saloon's got a room left."

"Saloon?" Emily looked across the street at the two-story broken-down building that served as the town's saloon. Reluctantly, she pulled her saddlebag off her sorrel and walked toward the saloon. It was smaller than she expected, dimly lit, with flickering oil lights and burgundy red walls. Except for the bartender, there were only two men playing cards at a corner table and a saloon girl leaning against the end of the bar. "I need a room," Emily said with gravel in her voice.

The bartender strode over to Emily, wiping the lip of a shot glass. "I reckon you do. But I'm afraid we're all full up."

"I just want to—"

"Sorry. Full up. You want a drink, you can drink." With that, the bartender slid the shot glass in Emily's direction and walked away.

Emily looked out the window. The town was beginning to come to life, with the sound of wagons and footsteps on the boardwalk. She started to take a step forward when a woman's voice cracked the air.

"I got a room." Emily looked around to find the saloon girl standing next to her. Dressed in an off-the-shoulder crimson satin dress that matched the paint on her lips and cheeks, she looked hard and beaten by life. "My name's Dotty."

"Well, I sure appreciate that. Thank you." She turned to pick up her saddlebag when suddenly, she felt Dotty's hot breath against her neck.

"It'll be my pleasure, sugar," Dotty whispered. Emily froze in her tracks, suddenly aware that Dotty was completely taken in by her disguise. "It's the third door from the end. You go on up when you're ready. I'll follow." She patted Emily's backside and strolled to the end of the bar.

Emily stood motionless, not believing what had just happened. This charade had gone too far. She started shaking and held on to the bar to steady herself. In doing so, she tipped over the shot glass. Without missing a beat, the bartender moved toward her and filled the glass with whiskey. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Dotty staring in her direction. With hardly a second of hesitation, Emily grabbed the shot glass and downed the liquor in one gulp. The liquid was no match for the pure grain alcohol she had swigged on the trail, but still, it seemed to burn a hole in her gut.

The saloon's swinging doors careened open and half a dozen large men entered, talking loudly and kicking dust across the floor. They crossed to the bar and the tallest of them banged his fist on the bar, sending the shot glasses

into motion. "Whiskey all around. Make it quick, hear?"

Emily attempted to pick up her saddlebag and slip out of the saloon, but each time she tried to hitch it over her shoulder, she lost her balance. The men's voices were loud and abrasive as they cut back and forth. The tall fellow downed a shot of whiskey and demanded another with a heavy swing of his arm to the side. In doing so, he clipped Emily on the back of the head. "Hey, watch it!" she heard herself say.

"What's that?" he hollered. Emily turned to find the tall fellow staring straight at her. The man looked to his friends and bellowed, "Looks like he don't want to talk now!"

Emily turned away and mumbled, "Leave me alone."

"What?"

"I said, leave me alone."

The man grabbed her by the arm and swung her around to face him. "Boy, don't you talk to me like that!"

Emily tried to pull away. "Let go!"

Dotty edged her way down the bar and pushed herself next to the man. "Hey, let him go. He's not doin' anything to you!"

The tall man, still keeping one hand firmly on Emily's arm, used the other to grab Dotty by the mouth and tightly squeeze her cheeks together. "Was I talking to you, woman?" He released his grip on Dotty's mouth, shoving her backwards into a card table.

Emily looked the man straight in the eye. He was like Barrett, minus Barrett's sophisticated exterior. "You are such a coward." She started to wriggle away but he caught her by the collar and knuckled her across the face. She fell to the floor, dazed. He looked around to his friends with a smile and then yanked Emily to her feet. With one strong thrust, he threw her over the bar, sending the shot glasses flying. He was about to jump over the bar when the sound of a hammer clicking back on a rifle was heard.

"Get outta here!" the bartender yelled, pointing a Winchester toward the man. "Go on!" The man swept the bar with the back of his hand. Slivers of shattered glass flew onto Emily's body. "Out!" the bartender said with full force. The man left the bar, his friends following close behind. The bartender slipped the rifle under the bar and turned to Dotty. "Take him upstairs!"

Emily was dazed as she leaned on Dotty for support. After some doing, Dotty reached her room and plopped Emily across the bed. Some glass pieces were stuck on Emily's shirt and collar. Dotty pulled off Emily's hat and slapped her face. "Hey, you. Hey! Are you okay?"

Emily tossed her head to the side and mumbled.

"Listen," Dotty continued, "I'm gonna take off your shirt—make sure you ain't got nothin' stuck in your skin." Dotty proceeded to unbutton Emily's shirt, picking out splinters of glass as she went. "You really don't know when to shut up, do ya? Hey, can you hear me?" No response. Dotty finished unbuttoning the shirt and discovered two others underneath it. She continued with the buttons. "Listen, you might need doctorin', so you better wake up and tell me who you are." With that, Dotty peeled off the final shirt, looked down at Emily's bare chest, and took a step backward. "What the—"

> "THIS WOMAN MUST BE CHARGED WITH IMPERSONATION AND FORGERY," BARRETT SAID. "HER HUSBAND, NOT SHE, HELD THE DEED TO THE LAND."

An hour passed and the street outside the saloon swelled with people, wagons, and activity. Then somewhere out of the noise and dust, a man appeared on horseback, followed by five others. The group stopped in front of the land office. Deftly, the leader of the group swung his legs off his saddle and brushed the dust from his coat. He pulled a cane from behind his rifle strap and dug the tip into the dirt. "Wait here," he said to his men, and with that, Nathaniel Barrett walked into the land office.

The same young man greeted Barrett with a smile. "Can I help you, sir?"

"Yes," Barrett said, pulling the deed from his coat pocket. "I believe there is a piece of land that goes with this deed."

The young man looked at the deed. "There must be a mistake."

"There is no mistake. That is the deed to my land."

"It can't be, sir. There's already a note to this land."

"That's impossible!" Barrett said, his voice edging up several notches.

"Sir, the ledger proves it," the young man said, sifting through the pages and pointing to the last name on the page.

Barrett eyed the name. He pressed his lips together, then looked at the young man. "That's a forgery."

"No, sir. I saw the man sign it."

"Then you saw a ghost."

"Sir?"

"He's dead. I came across his camp weeks ago. He was shot and

burned out. The person who signed this ledger has committed serious fraud. You take my deed and give me the rightful note. *Now!*"

Dotty sat next to Emily's bed, tapping her foot angrily on the wood-planked floor. "Wake up!" she yelled, kicking the bed frame with her boot. Emily stirred and opened her eyes. She looked around the room, not sure where she was. She saw her saddlebag, clothes, and hat stacked in a heap at the foot of the bed. Dotty leaned closer and angrily said, "You have a lot of nerve, makin' me look the fool!"

"I never said I was . . . you just thought . . . and . . ." Emily suddenly looked outside the window and sat up. "Oh, God, what time is it?"

"What the hell are you, anyway?"

Emily grabbed her shirts and quickly put them on. "My name's Emily Morgan and I wasn't making you the fool." She swung her legs over the bed and felt a dull ache engulf her body. She braced herself against the bed and spotted her reflection in the mirror. A dark blue bruise was welling up across her left jaw where she had been struck. As Emily pulled on her trousers and shoes, Dotty stood up, kicking the chair to the side.

"You must be in one heap of trouble."

"One day, I'll tell you all about it. Right now I've got to get to the land office."

Dotty shifted the sleeve over her shoulder and let out a deep sigh. "You ain't gonna tell anybody what I said to you, are you? I'd never hear the end of it."

"The bartender told you to bring me up here. You gave me a bed to lie on. You pulled the glass out of my shirt. Before that, nothing happened."

Dotty nodded her head nervously. "Thank you." She looked down at the floor and spotted the silver thimble Emily had found on the trail. "Hey, something fell out of your pocket."

> "WHAT KIND OF LEGAL SYSTEM DO YOU HAVE WHERE A WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF INSANITY CAN CLAIM ENTITLEMENT TO PROPERTY!" BARRETT ROARED.

Emily picked it up and stuffed it in her left shirt pocket. "Souvenir from the trip," she said. "Where's my belt?" Dotty motioned to a chair by the window. Emily quickly grabbed it and started to fasten the belt around her waist when she stole a look outside the window, just in time to see Barrett angrily walking out of the land office, followed by the young man. "No!" Emily screamed as she grabbed her saddlebag and headed for the door.

Wagons crisscrossed through the dust making it almost impossible for Emily to cross the street. Finally, she found an opening and plowed through. Barrett stood on the boardwalk in a bitter debate with the young man. He stopped for a moment and turned to see Emily. She moved closer to him. "You see my face now?" she said. "Is it what you expected?"

The young man took a closer look at Emily without her hat. The voice was different, but he realized that Emily was the person he had met in his office. With a confused expression, he sputtered, "Well, this here's the feller—I mean, the young woman—who signed the ledger."

"My name is Emily Morgan. Where's the sheriff?" Emily asked pointedly.

"I was about to ask the same question," Barrett replied. "This woman must be arrested for impersonation and forgery with intent to defraud." Barrett raised his voice to a roar. "Someone get the sheriff!"

Emily started for Barrett, "You son of a—" but before she could touch him, two of his men grabbed her.

The sheriff made his way through the crowd that had quickly formed around the land office. "What in the hell's goin' on here?" he said, wedging himself between Barrett and Emily. He caught one sight of Emily and was taken aback. "What happened to you?"

Emily jerked her body free from Barrett's two men. "I'm Emily Morgan. I own Hank Taylor's land, fair and square. This young man gave me the note this morning."

"Under false pretenses!" Barrett raged. "This woman is obviously mentally unbalanced. Just look at her. The note to that land belongs to me."

"Now, hold on, both of you," the sheriff said, waving his hands. "Whatever's goin' on here won't be settled in the street. Get in there," he ordered, motioning toward the land office. Barrett strode into the office, followed by the sheriff and Emily. Barrett's men and a dozen townsfolk trailed behind the young land office clerk, who moved closer to the sheriff.

The sheriff swung two chairs in front of him and looked toward Barrett and Emily. "Sit down." They obliged. "Hank Taylor's land, eh? I heard tell that he

signed over more than one deed. So, you," the sheriff said, looking at Barrett. "What's your story?"

"My name is Nathaniel Barrett. I am the only one present legally entitled to Mr. Taylor's land. This woman must be charged with impersonation and forgery. Her husband, not she, held the deed."

"Who's she tryin' to impersonate?" the sheriff said, confused.

"Why, her husband, of course."

"I'm not impersonating anyone," Emily exclaimed.

"Mrs. Morgan—" the sheriff said, irritated.

Emily continued, undaunted. "My husband, Edward, was shot and killed on the Colorado-Kansas border more than two weeks ago by this man."

"Sheriff, this woman is insane!"

"I was scared to death. I didn't know if they knew I was alive and would come after me, so I disguised myself."

"My God, woman," Barrett shouted. "You're talking nonsense."

"I have proof, Sheriff. I met a man named Joe Carter on the trail. He told me the whole story—how Barrett wanted Hank Taylor's land so bad that he'd kill for it."

"This is outrageous!" Barrett yelled, his hand tightly clenching his cane.

"Not for what's *on* the land," Emily persisted, "but what's *in* it."

The blood in Barrett's face reached a boiling point. "Sheriff, I will not sit here and be accused of murder!"

"And there was Chester Smith. He was the third person vying for Taylor's land until Mr. Barrett ended his life, too."

It was then that Emily noticed Barrett's cane was missing the silver tip. She felt into her left shirt pocket and partly pulled out the "thimble" she had found wedged into the ground during her trip.

WITH A FLICK OF HIS WRIST, BARRETT PULLED A REVOLVER FROM UNDER HIS COAT AND POINTED IT DIRECTLY AT JOE. EMILY MOVED TO PUSH JOE AWAY.

The mystery was solved as she shoved it back into her pocket.

"Mrs. Morgan," the sheriff offered, "this Joe Carter feller. Where is he?"

"I imagine in Marshall City. That's where he said he was headed."

"Ma'am," the sheriff interjected, "if you don't mind me askin', why ain't this Joe Carter standin' next to you and speakin' the story himself?"

Emily sank into her chair. She'd asked the same question. "He's afraid," she said.

"Afraid?" the sheriff said. "Well, he must be quite a man."

"Sheriff," Barrett offered, calming his voice, "if I may?"

"Go ahead."

"I think I understand what has happened. Approximately two weeks ago, my men and I came upon a burned out campsite. Beneath the rubble, we found a man's body. It was, by all accounts, a gruesome sight. We assumed this man had a wife and searched the area for her. Upon finding no woman, we moved on. Now, the way I see it, Mrs. Morgan, in obvious shock, saw us, and not thinking clearly, pieced together a twisted story of murder and whatnot. Her actions that followed, including her strange disguise, only prove that she had lost control of her senses. She's even conveniently concocted an imaginary man to relate the tale. I suppose one must pity her, more than anything."

As Barrett spoke, Emily sat stone-faced, her body trembling with each lie. To sit this close to such evil was more than she could stand. What was worse, the sheriff was listening to Barrett and he was winning.

"And so," Barrett continued, "if we could please get back to the issue at hand. The land note?"

With pent-up rage, she spoke softly but to the point. "The deal was clear. The first person who got here was the one who got the land. I was the first."

"Dear lady," Barrett said in a patronizing voice, "it was Edward Morgan and he alone who was legally authorized to sign his name to the ledger."

"There was nothing in our agreement that stated that."

"Forgery is forgery, no matter how you call it."

"I didn't forge anything. I signed exactly the name on the deed."

"Which was your husband's name. Sheriff, please!"

Emily looked up at the young man. "You've got the deed. You've got the signature. Show them."

Flustered, the young man shuffled through a stack of papers until he uncovered the deed. He opened the ledger and compared the names. The sheriff leaned over and looked from the deed to the ledger and back again. "Is there a reason why your husband signed his name like this?"

"Quicker, I guess."

"Well, Mr. Barrett, I'm afraid forgery can't be an issue. It seems Mr. Edward Morgan was accustomed to signin' his name 'E. Morgan.' Mrs. Morgan—Mrs. *Emily*

Morgan—signed the ledger the same way, which is identical to her own first initial. She was, in fact, simply signin' her own name."

"You can't be serious!" Barrett roared. "What kind of a legal system have you got in this town where a woman bordering on the edge of insanity can claim legal entitlement to property! You cannot sit there and tell me this woman is mentally competent."

"Well, I'd have to agree with you. I'm not sure of her reasoning abilities. Mrs. Morgan has obviously gone through some sort of shock which has left her . . . fragile."

"Don't you dare try to make me out to be crazy! I didn't risk my life all these miles to come here and be accused of losing my mind. And I may be a lot of things in this life, but fragile is not one of them. I stand by every single word I've said here. This man is a cold-blooded killer."

"Ma'am," the sheriff said, lowering his voice, "I'm sorry. You've got no proof—"

From just outside the land office, a man spoke up. "Yes, sir. She does."

The sheriff looked around the crowd of townspeople gathered in the room. "Who said that?"

A slim man edged his way through the crowd and moved toward the sheriff. Emily looked up and couldn't believe her eyes. It was Joe Carter. He spoke so that everyone could hear. "I'm Joe Carter. Everything this woman is telling you is true. I swear to God in heaven." Joe pulled a large, folded piece of paper out of his pocket and handed it to the sheriff. "I wrote it all out so as you'd have it on record. Everything's in there—every detail. How I met Mr. Barrett and his men on the trail and rode along, how he drank my whiskey and told me about the land he was chasin', how the hills had silver, how he would do anythin' to get it—even shoot and burn out a man near the Colorado-Kansas border. How I was scared to death of him and how he asked me to kill another man, which I wouldn't do, so he did, and how I knew that I was a dead man if he ever caught up to me." Joe stopped, clearing his throat nervously. "And how I met a woman who I could have helped, but I rode on instead. It's all in there. I reckon," his voice faltered, "I reckon I made two mistakes, Sheriff. The first was ridin' with a man I didn't trust. The second was turnin' my back on someone who needed my help."

> EMILY OPENED HER EYES SLOWLY, LOOKED AROUND THE ROOM AND SAW JOE, AND FOR A MOMENT, COULD NOT REMEMBER WHERE SHE WAS.

The silence in the room lay heavy. Barrett's men shifted from one foot to the other with an uneasy scuff of their boots. Even Barrett—slick and calm up to now—tapped his finger nervously against his thigh. The sheriff stared Joe straight in the eye, sizing up his character. He glanced once more at the piece of paper Joe had given him, then looked over to Barrett. "You got anything you want to say, Mr. Barrett?"

"My God! Can't you see it's a setup? All you have to do is listen to his story. It makes no sense. Do I look like a man who would shoot another man in the back? It's all so very—"

"Wait a second," the sheriff interrupted. "Who said he was shot in the back?"

Barrett froze. "He did, of course. Just now!"

"No, sir," the sheriff insisted. "He said 'shot,' but he didn't say where. But he did say where on this note. Right here," the sheriff pointed to the line, "it says, 'Barrett told me he shot the man in the back.' "

Barrett's men started to move in closer. The sheriff stood and quickly drew his pistol. "All right, boys, you just hold it right where you are." The townsfolk who had straggled into the land office pushed their way outside.

Barrett gripped his cane tightly. "Sheriff, you're making a grave mistake."

"We'll let a court of law decide that, sir. Why don't you just move over there with your men and we'll all go over to the jail and sit a spell." The sheriff used his free arm to reach out toward Emily. "Ma'am, you and Mr. Carter might be more comfortable outside."

For only a moment, the sheriff turned his attention away from Barrett. But a moment was all it took. With a flick of his wrist, Barrett pulled a long-nosed revolver from under his coat and pointed it directly at Joe. Emily saw the gun and moved toward Joe to push him away, when a deafening shot rang out. As Emily and Joe fell to the floor, she suddenly felt a hot pain burn the left side of her chest. Another shot was fired, this time by the sheriff, and Emily heard the hard thud of a man falling to the floor. The sheriff swung around toward the five men and clicked the hammer back on his gun. "Drop your guns!" he yelled.

Emily lifted her head. And then everything went black.

The slow tick-tock of the clock was the only sound in the tiny upstairs room that served as the

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town's clinic. Joe Carter was slumped in a hard-backed chair. Emily lay in a narrow bed, sound asleep. The sun warmed the four windows that framed the room, pouring in shafts of light. Emily opened her eyes slowly, looked around the room and saw Joe, and for a moment, could not remember where she was. Then, as the memories came back, she reached for her chest, where she had been shot. Looking under the covers, all she saw were bandages spotted with blood. Joe stirred and came to life quickly.

"Mrs. Morgan, you're awake. You had us worried there for a while, ma'am. How do you feel?"

"What day is it?"

"Tuesday, ma'am. You've been out about a day. Your head hit the floor pretty hard. Knocked you out cold."

"My head? I was shot. . . ."

"Well, the bullet hit you, ma'am, but it didn't go far."

"Then why is my chest sore?"

"Reckon the impact, ma'am." Joe dug his fingers into his vest pocket. "I had 'em save it so I could show you. I didn't reckon you'd believe me if I told you." He pulled out Barrett's silver cane tip with a small bullet wedged into one side. "You had it in your pocket, remember? It saved your life. Half an inch either way and you'd be dead right now."

Emily suddenly remembered the whole scene. "Where's Barr—"

"He's dead, ma'am. Sheriff killed him. The five fellers he rode with are in jail, waitin' on the circuit judge to decide their fate."

Emily looked around the room for her belongings. "My saddlebag. It's got the note and money and—"

"I've got everything here for you. You don't have to worry about nothin'."

Emily lay back, her chest aching. "Thank you." She held out her hand to Joe and he gently held it. "Thank you for everything."

"Ma'am, please, you don't need to thank me. I should have come with you. I should have done the right thing—"

"It doesn't matter. You were there when it counted."

"I suppose so, ma'am."

"Aren't you supposed to be in Marshall City about that job?"

"Job started two days ago. I reckon they'll find someone else more reliable."

"I see."

"I've got your horse down at the livery. I asked about where your land is, and when you feel up to it, I'll get a buckboard and take you out to see it."

"My land. Is it really mine?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Tomorrow. You take me out there tomorrow."

The following day, with renewed strength, Emily slipped into a blue calico dress that had been sent over to her with a card that read, "Here's somethin' I don't wear no more. Hope you're feelin' better. Dotty."

Joe picked her up in the buckboard with her sorrel tied to the rear. The day was cool and clear, with a crystal blue sky overhead. As they left the town of Jett and moved into the countryside, a soft wind blew through the tall green grass, causing waves of motion that flowed far into the horizon. They trotted up a gentle slope and Joe stopped the horses at the crest. There beneath them lay a green valley, flooded with yellow and red wildflowers. Several streams cut through the rich, dark soil, trickling toward the towering snowcapped mountains that encircled the land.

"Well," Joe said softly. "You're here."

Emily gazed awestruck at the magnificence of the land. From high on the hill, she could see past the mountains and miles into the distance. What struck her most was the perfection of it all—as though God himself had carved out this valley for his own pleasure. Here, there was peace and hope. Here, there was a future. "Oh, Edward," Emily said softly, "you did good." She turned to Joe. "You know, it's really true."

"What's that, ma'am?"

"About this land. It truly does change you. And you do see yourself for who you really are."

"I reckon you're gonna be a rich lady pretty soon, what with all that silver you'll cut out of those mountains."

"No. I couldn't do that. Look at them. They have weathered storms since the beginning of time. They have survived the worst this world has had to offer. And through it all, they have remained. No, I cannot cut out their heart. I'm a farmer, Joe. I want to make things grow. I want to see life come out of that ground."

Joe smiled. "Folks aren't gonna know what to make of you, ma'am. Tradin' a mountain of silver for a plow. It ain't what they're gonna expect."

"I'm not so worried about people's opinions. I imagine I shall confound most people from this moment on."

"Yes, ma'am," he said with a chuckle.

"Joe?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"I can't do this alone. What do you know about farming?"

"Born and raised on a farm, ma'am. I was plantin' seeds since I could walk."

"Well, if you're interested, you've got a job. You don't have to give me an answer now. You think on it. We best get back to town. I've got plans to put in order."

"Yes, ma'am." Joe picked up the reins. "You know, things worked out all right for you in the end."

"Oh, Joe, this isn't the end," Emily declared. "This is the beginning." ✠

BY
Ambrose Bierce

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the

two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between bridge and fort were spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a mustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age.

stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted, and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the crossties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt, and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand—a sharp, distinct metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and

spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

Peyton Farquhar knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream.

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in wartime. Meanwhile, he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek Bridge, put it in order, and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek Bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side of the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband, and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose

about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. "To be hanged and drowned," he thought, "that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair."

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. "Put it back, put it back!" He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

Suddenly Farquhar heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head.

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragonflies' wings, the strokes of the water spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half around; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and sub-

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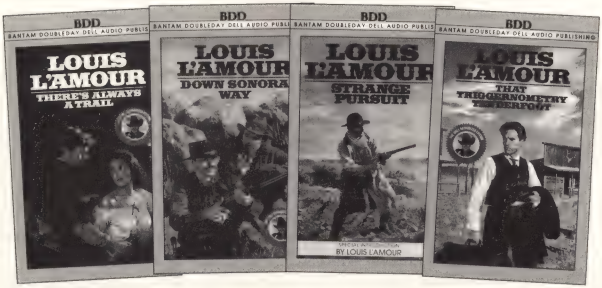

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dued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, and enforcing tranquility in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words:

"Attention, company! . . . Shoulder arms! . . . Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!"

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther downstream—nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

"The officer," he reasoned, "will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!"

An appalling plash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, *diminuendo,* which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

"They will not do that again," he thought; "the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun."

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls, and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of aeolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape—was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

By nightfall, Farquhar was fatigued, footsore, famished. The thought of his wife and children urged him on.

A whiz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in

so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famished. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again, he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and, lifting his hand to it, he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he has fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

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COL. W. F. CODY

"BUFFALO BILL"

BUFFALO BILL CODY

BY GRIFFIN OLIVER

SINCE HE WAS BIGGER THAN LIFE, it was appropriate that he be bigger than death.

Eighteen thousand people came to Buffalo Bill Cody's funeral in January 1917, choking the road to Lookout Mountain to see him buried. A young *Denver Post* reporter named Gene Fowler followed the procession, which included the garishly painted wagons of the Sells-Floto Circus, from the city up to the mountaintop tomb a few miles southwest of Denver, and took notes of the speeches "being made by expert liars." Fowler had interviewed the aging showman and become his friend, drinking companion, and admirer, and years later would write of Cody as "perhaps the handsomest American of all time" and would say "he sat his white stallion like a dream prince."

But Fowler knew the real Buffalo Bill as well—the man who "lived with the world at his feet and died with it on his shoulders"—while most of the others clotting the road to Lookout Mountain that bitter cold funeral day knew little more than what they learned attending his Wild West shows and reading dime novel prose about him. Prose such as:

> Face to face, knee to knee, hand to hand, Raven Feather and Buffalo Bill met. Twice the borderman parried the deadly thrusts of the wily chief—twice again the steel of the savage drank his blood, but weak from twenty wounds, the Indian's eyes were not

sure, and soon the knife of the brave borderman reached his body with a fearful thrust. . . . Buffalo Bill, anxious as he was to hurry back to his loved ones, had to delay to have the blood staunched which poured from many a sad gash in his noble frame.

In the last half of his life, Cody's genuine accomplishments as Pony Express rider, Indian fighter, scout, and frontiersman were sublimated as he worked assiduously to build the proportions of the mythic Buffalo Bill. There can be little wonder that by the time he died, few people could winnow the grains of truth from the bushels of legend. Even today, few know anything but the myth.

The man who came to stand as the veritable image and symbol of the Old West was born William Frederick Cody, third of eight children of Isaac and Mary Ann Leacock Cody, on a farm near Le Claire, Scott County, Iowa, on February 26, 1846. "Billy," as he was called as a youth, had a rough and intermittent country school education. His family moved to Kansas in 1854, after the territory opened to settlement, and situated in the Salt Creek Valley near Leavenworth.

Isaac Cody was a religious man, a dabbler in politics, and a staunch and outspoken abolitionist. The latter trait, anathema in pro-slavery Kansas, proved his undoing, and not many months after the family settled in the new territory, Isaac was stabbed in the chest in an argument over slavery. He survived the wound but his health declined after the incident, and he died in 1857. His widow, forced to take in boarders to feed her eight children, took Billy, now eleven, to Leavenworth to find him a job.

His first employment was as a mounted messenger with Russell, Majors & Waddell for a time but returned to work for the company in 1860 when it launched its "Pony Express" mail route from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco. Cody apparently answered the company's appeal ("Wanted: Young, skinny, wiry fellows, not over eighteen. Must be expert riders to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.") and carried mail pouches along the 116-mile section of the route between Red Bluffs, on the North Platte, and Three Crossings, on the Sweetwater River in Nebraska.

Cody's Civil War service is somewhat obscure, but in 1861 he is known to have joined a band of Kansas Jayhawkers (Free State partisans and abolitionist guerrillas) who operated along the Kansas-Missouri border, stealing horses from secessionists. And in the 1862–65 period he scouted for the Ninth Kansas Volunteers on the Santa Fe Trail, worked as a teamster in the Denver area, and ended his service with the Seventh Kansas Volunteer Cavalry. He was mustered out of service in Leavenworth in September 1865.

To Cody, the most poignant event of this turbulent time occurred in December 1863, when he returned to Leavenworth to be at the bedside of his dying mother. "I loved her above all other persons," he said.

In the winter of 1864, while the Seventh Kansas was headquartered in St. Louis, he met Louisa Maud Frederici, twenty-two-year-old daughter of a prominent local businessman. The dime novelist Ned Buntline claimed Cody's first encounter with his future wife came about as he rescued her from a gang of drunken Union soldiers who were harassing her on a St. Louis street. "With one blow of his clenched hand he dashed the bulky miscreant to earth," Buntline wrote. "With his other arm he encircled the waist of the lovely girl and, lifting her to his

Buffalo Bill's first employment was as a mounted messenger with Russell, Majors & Waddell, the great freighting outfit.

Majors & Waddell, the great freighting outfit, which in 1857 was dispatching hundreds of wagons of supplies across the plains to army posts as federal troops were attempting to quell the rebellion of Mormon settlers in Utah. A boy among grizzled wagon masters, bull whackers, and scouts, Cody's job involved carrying messages and instructions from wagon to wagon as the great freight trains lumbered out of Leavenworth, up the Platte River to Wyoming Territory. On his first expedition to Fort Laramie, in October 1857, the train on which he was employed was captured by Mormon guerrillas on Big Sandy Creek in eastern Wyoming. All but one of the company's wagons were confiscated by the Mormon band, and the wagon master and his crew, including Billy Cody, retired to Fort Bridger for the winter.

By the time he was fifteen, he had made many freighting trips up the Platte, had become a skilled horseman, and had learned from on-the-job training the ways and skills of scouts, trappers, and miners. He left Russell,

saddlebow, gave the word 'On!' to his noble horse and dashed through and over the crowd. . . ." (Buntline heroes were always ambidextrous and *dash, dashed,* and *dashing* were beloved dime novel locutions.)

But Louisa's own story, related in her *Memories of Buffalo Bill* (1919), is perhaps the best source for information on her introduction to the man she called Will throughout their turbulent fifty years of marriage. A cousin of Louisa's asked permission to bring a young Union soldier to the Frederici house. Louisa was dozing in the parlor when the cousin and the nineteen-year-old Cody entered, and Cody playfully pulled the chair out from under her. She struggled to her feet and slapped the impertinent young man's face. He apologized profusely and Louisa calmed down. She recalled that she had never seen a handsomer man. He was clean-shaven, "the ruddiness of health glowing in his cheeks," and she remembered his glorious blue uniform, his "graceful, lithe, smooth" movements, and "the modulations of his speech." He was, she said, "quite the most wonderful man I had ever known, and I almost bit my tongue to keep from telling him so."

Each was smitten with the other. "Lulu"—as Cody soon came to call her—was a proper, temperamental, spoiled young woman who imagined herself a "romantic." But while she listened, enthralled, at Will's tales of the Mormon War, Jayhawker raids, and Indians on the plains, her idea of bliss eternal was a life rooted somewhere in civilization, preferably St. Louis, with a hard-working, ambitious, homebody husband in gainful employment—a life with children, respectability, and stability.

Cody, on the other hand, had set his course. At age nineteen or seventy, he remained a nomad.

CODY CARED NOTHING FOR MONEY, HOME, POSSESSIONS; HE WAS GREGARIOUS, FUN-LOVING, ACCESSIBLE, EXCITED ABOUT LIFE'S ENDLESS POTENTIAL.

He had a passion for the carefree life of the Great West—he wanted to see all of it, know the men who made their mark in it, and make his own mark. He cared nothing for money, home, possessions; he was gregarious, fun-loving, accessible, excited about life's endless potential.

He was, in brief, everything Louisa was not. Everything that excited him horrified Louisa; he was her polar opposite in virtually every thought and characteristic.

So, naturally, they married. Cody left her in the spring of 1865, and while awaiting his discharge, took a job as a stage driver in the area between Fort Kearny and Plum Creek, Nebraska. True to his promise to "Lulu," he saved his money, and by the time he returned to St. Louis in March 1866 and married her, he had bought an old boardinghouse in the Salt Creek Valley near the family home.

His first and only attempt at domesticity was short-lived: After their wedding in the Frederici parlor, he took his bride to Leavenworth, thence to their new property at Salt Creek. The boardinghouse became the Golden Rule House hotel, but after a few months of puttering around the isolated hostelry, Cody quit welcoming wayfarers and became one himself. "It proved too tame employment for me," he later wrote, "and again I sighed for the freedom of the plains." He and Louisa departed (probably with considerable rancor; nor was this the last time they would part in such a way: he seemed always to make promises to her that he could not keep). She returned to her family in St. Louis and he headed to Fort Hays to look for outdoor work.

In the fall of 1866, through the efforts of William Butler Hickok, a former army wagon boss he had met in Leavenworth in 1861, Cody found employment as a civilian scout out of Fort Hays. Through mid–1867 he worked for the Tenth U.S. Cavalry along the Saline River of Kansas, then took employment as a track grader for the Union Pacific Railroad. It was during this latter, mundane labor, not long after his friend Hickok had been immortalized in dime novels as "Wild Bill," that Cody earned his own celebrated nickname.

When a Hays City company, the Goddard Brothers, won the contract to feed Union Pacific rail crews, Cody was hired, at a healthy five hundred dollars a month, as Goddard's chief buffalo hunter. He was a skilled marksman with "Lucretia," his .50-caliber Springfield breechloader, and in eighteen months on the job he killed 4,280 buffalo.

When the U-P tracks reached Sheridan, Kansas, Cody and an army scout, William Averill "Billy" Comstock, held a buffalo shooting contest. In eight hours, Cody killed sixty-nine animals, Comstock forty-six; and somebody declared the stalwart young

marksman the champion buffalo hunter of the Plains. It was an honor that would come in handy when Ned Buntline learned of it about a year later.

In 1868, Cody worked as a scout between forts Larned, Hays, and Dodge in Kansas. In July of that year, while bands of Cheyennes were rampaging through settlements around Council Grove and a huge camp of Comanches and Kiowas sprang up near Fort Larned, he set out on a sixty-five-mile ride from Fort Larned to Fort Hays to take the news of the Indian movements to Gen. Philip H. Sheridan. The general received the news with gratitude and dispatched the scout on a ninety-five-mile ride to Fort Dodge, carrying saddlebags full of dispatches and instructions. This was a particularly dangerous journey, and one on which several other couriers had been killed. Cody made the trip unscathed, got some brief sleep, and rode back to Fort Larned, thence back to Fort Hays—over 350 miles in under sixty hours.

Sheridan was so impressed that he appointed Cody chief of scouts for the Fifth Cavalry, headquartered at Fort Hays.

In October 1868, Cody joined the Fifth under Maj. Gen. Eugene A. Carr, in pursuit of a band of Cheyenne "Dog Soldiers" (a warrior society) and Sioux renegades who were raiding in central Kansas and had taken two white women captive. The marauders were led by one Hotoa-qa-ilhoois—Tall Bull—a veteran of the Beecher's Island battle on the Arikaree fork of the Republican River the previous October.

Attached to Carr's command as it rode out of Fort Lyon, Colorado Territory, in the summer of 1869 were three companies of Pawnee scouts commanded by Maj. Frank North. In all, Carr had 244 troopers, 200 Pawnees—hereditary enemies of the Sioux—and a contingent of scouts led by Cody. The Indians were trailed along the Republican River and Cody, riding in front with a dozen of North Pawnees, located their camp on July 11, south of the South Platte at a place called Summit Springs.

THE MAN WHO WOULD PUSH CODY OVER THE BRINK WAS NAMED EDWARD JUDSON, BETTER KNOWN BY HIS "NED BUNTLINE" PENNAME.

Carr attacked the camp that afternoon, and when the dust settled, fifty-two Cheyennes were dead, including their leader.

Frank North, or his brother Luther, may have killed Tall Bull, but Cody is generally credited with the act and he certainly never denied it.

When the Fifth returned from the campaign that summer and set up headquarters at Fort McPherson, near the North Platte in central Kansas, the scout made his ritual trip to St. Louis to visit Louisa, returned to McPherson to await employment, and there stood on the brink of the turning point of his life.

The man who would push Cody over the brink was a stumpy, seedy-looking, baggy-eyed forty-six-year-old New Yorker named Edward Zane Carroll Judson, better known for the "Ned Buntline" penname he had used in the over four hundred dime novels and serials he wrote for publications back East. It appears he wrote a great deal based on his own experiences. He had been a sailor, had served in the Seminole, Mexican, and Civil wars, and in 1846 had come close to being lynched in Tennessee after killing a man in a brawl. He had led the mob that rioted on May 18, 1849, outside the Astor Place Opera House, where English actor William Macready, playing Macbeth, was giving the farewell performance of his American tour—an incident in which twenty-two rioters were killed. Buntline was convicted of inciting a riot and spent a year in prison. He was the organizer of the antiforeign Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s, and between advocating political and miscellaneous other causes, and dodging creditors and ex-wives, battled his personal booze demons, gave temperance lectures, and looked for new material for his growing dime novel business.

In the late summer of 1869 Buntline, who read in New York papers about the Summit Springs battle, came out to North Platte, Nebraska, to look up Frank North, prominently mentioned in the press for his work with the Pawnee scouts. At Fort McPherson he found his man, but North wanted no part of him or immortalization in cheap fiction. "If you want a man to fill that bill," North told Buntline, "he's over there under that wagon."

Buntline, had he been up to it, might have turned a cartwheel. Over there, hung over and snoozing under the wagon, lay an engaging twenty-three-year-old man, handsome as Apollo, stone broke, out of work. When he awoke, he began talking a blue streak about everything from hunting buffalo and killing Indians to his pregnant wife back in

St. Louis. (Louisa gave birth to their son, Kit Carson Cody, that November.)

Buntline had found a hero awaiting his biographer.

The writer returned to New York and on December 23, 1869, a new serial was advertised in the *Street and Smith New York Weekly* titled *Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border Men,* and subtitled "The Wildest and Truest Story I Ever Wrote." Those who read it, including its subject, learned that Buffalo Bill Cody, the dashing hero of Summit Springs, had not only killed Tall Bull, but had done it with a dash into the hostile camp with reins in one hand, pistol in the other, as the Cheyenne was raising his hatchet to the head of a white female captive.

In the three years that followed his dime novel debut, while Buntline ground out new serials and novels about him, Cody did work that served as grist for the writer's insatiable mill. Out of Fort McPherson he led members of the Third U.S. Cavalry in pursuit of Indians who had raided a railroad station, killed some men, and run off with a herd of horses. He led six men to within fifty yards of the hostile camp and, with his troopers, killed three of the hostiles and ran the others off. He scouted for the Fifth Cavalry on numerous expeditions, fought in nine Indian engagements, and on May 22, 1872, probably at the urging of General Sheridan, who was generous in his praise of Cody's "endurance and courage," was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

(The medal, together with over nine hundred others, was rescinded in 1917 in a purging of awards given to entire Civil War units, to the honor guard at Lincoln's funeral, and to civilians. Cody was determined to have been a civilian scout and therefore ineligible for the medal. In 1989 the rules were again revised and his medal was restored to him—seventy-two years after his death.)

Cody and Yellow Hair, who seem to have ridden into each other by accident, each fired at the other.

In 1872, at the urging of Buntline, Cody traveled to Chicago with his hunting-scouting friend John B. "Texas Jack" Omohundro, to appear in Buntline's overripe stage melodrama, *The Scouts of the Prairies.* This memorable production, which a *Chicago Times* critic said combined "incongruous dialogue and execrable acting" with "intolerable stench, scalping, blood, and thunder," played to packed houses at the Nixon Amphitheater, then went east on tour to the Bowery Theater in New York and elsewhere. Even after Buntline dropped out over a dispute about the proceeds, the show brought in standing room only crowds and Cody came away from the enterprise with six thousand dollars—a small fortune in 1872.

Now he followed two careers. He returned to the West to scout for the army during the summers, reunited with Louisa and his growing family in St. Louis—daughters Arta and Orra and son Kit—then in the fall traveled east to tour with the revised and rewritten *Scouts of the Prairies* in the winter and spring. He even talked his old friend "Wild Bill" Hickok into joining the troupe in the fall of 1873. Hickok endured a few shows but found acting "ridiculous," so he collected his earnings and quit.

The spring 1876 *Scouts* tour ended abruptly when Cody's son, six-year-old Kit, fell ill with scarlet fever. The showman returned to St. Louis and the boy died in his arms. Inconsolable over Kit's death, Cody lost himself in scouting work and rejoined the Fifth Cavalry. In July—a month after the massacre of five companies of Custer's Seventh Cavalry on the Little Bighorn—he began service with Maj. Gen. Wesley Merritt in the Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory.

That July over a thousand Cheyennes fled the Red Cloud Agency at Fort Robinson in northern Nebraska, and three days later Merritt and his Fifth Cavalry, with Cody as chief scout, found the Indians strung out along Hat Creek, about thirty miles out of Fort Robinson. Hidden in the hills above the creek, Cody watched as one band of Cheyennes split off from the main party and began to ride across the plain toward an advancing army wagon train. With his commander's permission, he and eight troopers and scouts rode down to intersect them.

What resulted that clear and hot day of July 17, 1876, on Hat Creek (near present-day Montrose, Nebraska) was Buffalo Bill's celebrated "duel" with the Cheyenne war leader Hay-o-wei—called by Cody and others (perhaps to avoid confusion with Custer's Indian name) Yellow Hand, but more properly Yellow Hair, son of Cut Nose, a Cheyenne chief. Cody and Yellow Hair, who seem to have ridden into each other by accident, each fired at the other, the Indian's bullet missing, Cody's killing the Indian's horse. Now dismounted, they fired at

each other again. Cody emerged untouched, while his bullet struck the Cheyenne in the head, killing him instantly. One of Merritt's men on the hill watched it all through a telescope and saw Cody take the Indian's scalp.

The killing of Yellow Hair—which Cody, ever mindful of the post–Little Bighorn call for retribution, called "The First Scalp for Custer"—was transformed into a five-act play that did landmark business on the eastern tour. As part of the performance, the actual scalp and Yellow Hair's warbonnet were displayed.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West show was an outgrowth of Cody's stage performances, the proliferating dime novels purporting to chronicle his adventures, and Cody's own innate P. T. Barnum–like sense of the public hunger to experience, vicariously, the excitement and adventure of the frontier. The official debut of the great outdoor extravaganza took place on May 17, 1883, in Omaha, with garish great three-sheet posters proclaiming, "The Grassy Sward Our Carpet, Heaven's Azure Canopy Our Canvas, No Tinsel, No Gilding, No Humbug, No Sideshows or Freaks." The opener and the first tour were so successful, the public so enthusiastic, that the show would tour the United States and Europe for a quarter of a century. It would also preoccupy its star attraction for the rest of his life, make him a rich man, and establish him for all time as the apotheosis of the Old West—a symbol of that lost era that has not diminished with the passage of 113 years.

The Wild West show evolved over the years with new acts and improvements on old ones, but the time-proven popular features of the show remained essentially unchanged. There was a Pony Express race; the Deadwood stagecoach under attack by bandits or careening Indians in full paint and feathers; a depiction of "Custer's Last Fight" and a "reenactment," with considerable license, of the Yellow Hair "duel" and the "First Scalp for Custer"; Indian attacks on actual covered wagons; "grand, realistic scenes depicting the capture, torture, and death of a scout by the savages"; a reenactment of the Battle of Summit Springs and the death of Tall Bull; and always a massive number of horses, steers, mules, and even buffalo circling the arena and stirring up clouds of dust.

BUFFALO BILL, A BIG, HANDSOME MAN, RODE INTO THE ARENA AT THE MOST PROPITIOUS MOMENT, RACING HIS SNOW-WHITE MARE AROUND.

Trick riders and ropers were a mainstay, as were exhibitions of marksmanship by star performers Annie "Little Sure Shot" Oakley and her husband Frank "Doc" Carver, and periodic appearances by such figures as Sitting Bull, Frank North and his Pawnee scouts, and W. L. "Buck" Taylor, billed as "King of the Cowboys."

And always, as dependable as daylight, Buffalo Bill rode into the arena at the most propitious moment, racing his snow-white mare around and around, a big, handsome man with shoulder-length hair, grand mustaches and goatee, wearing fringed buckskins and boots and waving his wide sombrero, bowing and smiling and welcoming and exhorting the crowd and his troupe.

No one who ever saw the Wild West show ever forgot it or its star.

The show toured Europe four times—always to massive crowds. In France, the Wild West posters, depicting a rampaging buffalo herd, carried the simple slogan *Je Viens* ("I am coming"). Everybody knew who was coming. Cody, despite his legendary propensity for drink, never missed a performance and never appeared in one while drunk.

His last service to the army and his last work on the real western frontier occurred in December 1890 and in early 1891 when he volunteered his services to Gen. Nelson A. Miles and was sent to Standing Rock Agency in North Dakota. There he hoped to calm his friend Sitting Bull, suspected of plotting an outbreak from the agency. He was unable to visit the aging Hunkpapa Sioux chief and Sitting Bull was killed by agency police on December 15, 1890.

In 1893, Cody took his Wild West show to Chicago for the World's Columbian Exposition, but fair officials barred it from the grounds, calling it "too undignified." In response he rented fourteen acres of land opposite the fairgrounds and set up the Wild West show with a grandstand and seating for eighteen thousand customers. Thousands were turned away every day. The eminent British actor Sir Henry Irving attended both the fair and the Wild West show and pronounced the latter "infinitely better."

Despite these successes, by 1908 Buffalo Bill was broke. He

SUGGESTED READING

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Monaghan, Jay. *The Great Rascal: The Exploits of the Amazing Ned Buntline.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1952.

Russell, Don. *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.

Yost, Nellie Snyder. *Buffalo Bill.* Chicago: Swallow Press, 1979.

had lost several fortunes in bad investments and squandered untold thousands on would-be friends, cronies, and total strangers. Annie Oakley, who loved Cody as a father, said he was the most generous man who ever lived. "He was totally unable to . . . refuse any mortal in distress," she said, "and until his dying day he was the easiest mark for every kind of sneak and goldbrick vendor that was mean enough to take advantage of him."

For years Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie was his only competitor in the Wild West show business. In 1908 Lillie rescued Cody from bankruptcy and the two shows were merged as Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Far East Combined. But now Cody spent more and more time on the ranch he and Louisa had established in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming, not far from the town of Cody he had incorporated in 1901.

The Wild West show continued to tour until 1913, then, burdened with debt, rang down its dusty curtain on an era.

Cody, drained of his fortune, had by then come under the control of the unscrupulous owner of the *Denver Post,* Harry Tammen, and performed with Tammen's Sells-Floto Circus. He made his last appearance with the circus the November before his death.

Cody faced death with great gallantry and even indifference. From his bed at his sister's home in Denver, with Louisa and his family gathered around him, suffering from uremia and a failing heart, Cody asked the attending physician how long he had. The doctor answered tentatively, "The sand is slipping . . . " but the old showman would have none of that. "How long?" he insisted. "About thirty-six hours, sir," came the answer. Cody, the doctor recalled, heaved himself up on his pillows and called for his brother-in-law. When this man came to the edge of the bed, Cody said, "The doc says I've got thirty-six hours. Let's play some cards."

Buffalo Bill died on January 10, 1917.

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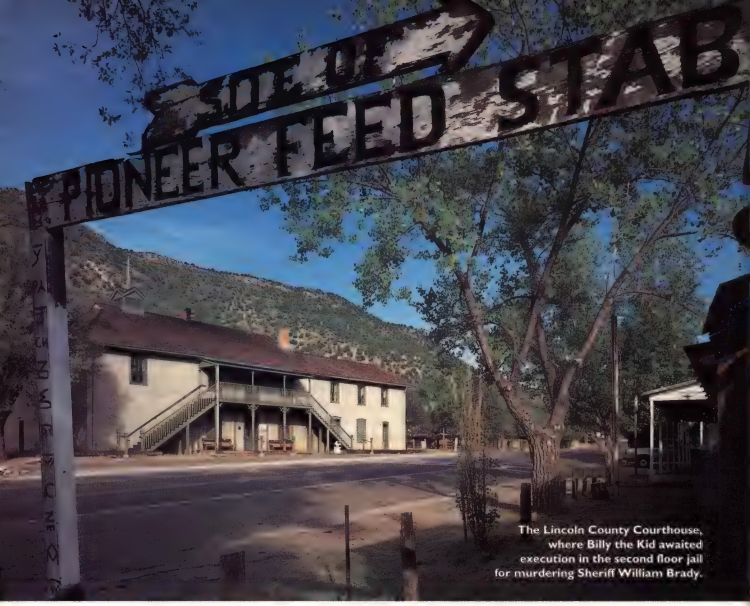

The Lincoln County Courthouse, where Billy the Kid awaited execution in the second floor jail for murdering Sheriff William Brady.

PHOTO BY LAURENCE PARENT

HENRY MCCARTY, CALLED "the Kid" for most of his brief life and "Billy" after he took the alias William Bonney, came out to New Mexico Territory as a teenager, lived there about eight years, and died there with a bullet in his heart at the age of twenty-one.

Why "Billy the Kid" is among that handful of Old West names—Wyatt Earp, Buffalo Bill, George Armstrong Custer, Butch Cassidy, Jesse James, Wild Bill Hickok, and Kit Carson among them—that are instantly recognized around the world is not clear. The Kid had no significant history. He never served in war, never blazed a trail, never traveled beyond a few hundred miles of his boyhood home, had no special talents, and knew no one of importance.

Until the spring of 1878 he was among a multitude of nameless drifting ciphers and ne'er-do-wells in the Southwest and by the summer of 1881 he was dead. His star blazed briefly during an obscure territorial power struggle and when he died, his own hometown newspaper celebrated

BILLY THE KID COUNTRY

BY HUGH McCORD

This tintype of Billy the Kid, sometimes reversed to give the erroneous impression that he was left-handed, is the only likeness of him in existence.

COURTESY OF THE LINCOLN COUNTY HERITAGE TRUST

the event by proclaiming him a "vulgar murderer and desperado."

Yet for all that, he is the most celebrated of all western outlaws and his story has gripped us for a century. Perhaps it was his youth that captivates us, or his rebel spirit, or his loyalty to a cause, or the mysteries surrounding his brief, violent life. His best biographer, Robert M. Utley, has said, "Billy the Kid strides boldly across America's mental landscape, symbolizing an enduring national ambivalence toward corruption

and violence." Maybe that is the key.

Whatever the case, 114 years after Pat Garrett gunned him down in a midnight raid on Pete Maxwell's place in Fort Sumner, he still strides boldly out there in Billy the Kid Country.

The Kid's last words were "*¿Quién es? Quién es?*"—"Who is it? Who is it?" To this day we ask that question about him.

He was born Henry McCarty in 1859, most likely in New York City, of Irish immigrant parents. Virtually nothing is known about his father, except that he disappeared from the story early in Henry's life. With his mother Catherine, Henry and his brother Joe lived briefly in Indiana, Kansas, and Colorado. In Santa Fe in 1873 Catherine married Civil War veteran William H. Antrim, a teamster, and the family soon moved to the frontier mining camp of Silver City in far southwestern New Mexico Territory, close on the Arizona border.

Catherine died of tuberculosis in Silver City in the fall of 1874 and her sons were boarded with a local butcher during their stepfather Antrim's long absences. Henry seems to have drifted into trouble at the age of fifteen when he had minor brushes with the law over petty thievery, including one incident, a year after his mother's death, in which he stole a bundle of laundry from two Silver City "celestials" (Chinese). He was placed in jail but, given the run of the place, escaped by climbing up a chimney.

He fled west into Arizona Territory and for two years remained more or less lost to recorded history. It is believed that he worked as a teamster, cowhand, and hay camp laborer in the Pinaleno Mountains around Camp Grant and the town of Bonito, about a hundred miles west of Silver City. In August 1877, in a Bonito saloon, Henry McCarty—soon to be called "Kid Antrim"—got into an altercation with Francis "Windy" Cahill, a Camp Grant blacksmith. This man, for reasons unknown, is said to have slapped the Kid and called him a pimp, and Henry is said to have called Cahill a "son of a bitch" and pulled a pistol from his belt. The blacksmith, who told the local lawman that he tried to wrest the gun from the young man but was shot "in the belly" for his efforts, died on August 18. A coroner's inquest found "Antrim, alias the Kid" guilty of "unjustifiable homicide."

WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF THE DAY DICK BREWER HIRED THE KID, THE BLOODY AFFAIR LATER KNOWN AS THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR EXPLODED.

Meantime, the Kid fled back across the border to the Silver City vicinity and after drifting for a time through the Tularosa Valley, rode into Lincoln County in October 1877. Now a fugitive using the name William Bonney, he found employment as a cowhand on a ranch owned by a wealthy young Englishman named John Tunstall.

Within four months of the day Tunstall's foreman Dick Brewer hired him, the bloody affair later known as the Lincoln County War exploded.

At the time of the Kid's arrival there, Lincoln County was the largest county in the United States. Its five thousand square miles in south-central New Mexico Territory stretched from the Texas line to the San Andres Mountains, its sparse population (about five thousand) scattered around the fringes of the arid Tularosa Basin and along the middle Pecos River.

The town of Lincoln, two hundred miles south of Santa Fe, had been settled in 1849 by Mexican farmers who called the place Las

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO #45559

Pete Maxwell's house. The near corner bedroom is the one in which Pat Garrett killed Billy.

MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO COLLECTION

ROBERT N. MULLIN COLLECTION

MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO COLLECTION

Top: John H. Tunstall, the British rancher who was Billy's boss.
Center: Tunstall's foreman, Dick Brewer, who was killed at Blazer's Mill.
Bottom: Murphy-Dolan-Riley competitor John Simpson Chisum.
Right: Governor Lew Wallace, who agreed to pardon Billy.

The Kid became an impassioned member of the Regulators, which at its peak numbered as high as sixty men.

RASCH COLLECTION

Placitas (signifying the shops in a small town square) and later Bonito ("pretty," the same as the Arizona town in which the Kid killed Windy Cahill), after the stream that flowed nearby. In 1869, with the formation of the county named for the late president, the town, now the county seat, adopted the same name.

The sinister cast of characters who would take part in one function of the Lincoln County War had gathered in Lincoln only a few years before the Kid's arrival there. Irish-born Lawrence G. Murphy, a former army major and post trader at Fort Stanton, came to Lincoln in 1869 and opened a general store and saloon that became known as "the House of Murphy" and "the Big Store." Murphy, who had an alliance with the "Santa Fe Ring," the clique of crooked politicians, including Governor Samuel B. Axtell, who controlled much of the economy and politics of the Territory, soon had a monopoly on supplying beef and flour to Fort Stanton and the Mescalero Apache Indian Agency. And, unchallenged in his business dealings, he charged local ranchers and settlers exorbitant prices for foodstuffs and hardware.

Murphy eventually took on two partners, New Yorker James J. Dolan and another Irishman named John H. Riley. The mission this trio set out to accomplish was to eliminate the competition being offered by John S. Chisum, the "Lord of the Bosque Grande" and "King of the Pecos," whose great Jinglebob outfit on the Pecos River near Roswell had beef aplenty to sell in New Mexico.

Now, into this volatile situation came yet another competitor to the Murphy-Dolan-Riley association. Alexander McSween was an asthmatic Canadian-born lawyer who had among his clients John Chisum. McSween moved to Lincoln in March 1875, bought an interest in a ranch, opened a bank, and built a store to challenge the Murphy combine. He had Chisum's support and financing from John Henry Tunstall, the twenty-five-year-old Englishman who had come west to make a fortune in the cattle business and who

had set up his ranch on the Rio Felíz, southeast of Lincoln.

Inevitably, the McSween-Tunstall bank and store attracted Murphy-Dolan customers and now a trail of powder had been laid, awaiting only the match to light it.

With Murphy out of the picture—he sold his interest to his partners in 1877, returned to Fort Stanton, and died there in October 1878—James Dolan took steps to eliminate the Tunstall-McSween annoyance and illegally obtained a writ of attachment on all the competitors' properties. Another member of this early-day Irish Mafia, Lincoln County Sheriff William Brady, had the duty of serving the writ on Tunstall and in February 1878, sent a deputy and a posse of at least fourteen men to the Rio Felíz to do the deed.

THE KID WAS ABOUT FIVE FOOT EIGHT, SLENDER, WITH SMALL HANDS AND FEET. HE WAS A LIKABLE BUT TIGHTLY COILED LAD.

Tunstall, meantime, decided to ride up to Lincoln and try to negotiate some kind of settlement with the Dolan faction. He gathered some of his hands, including foreman Dick Brewer and young Billy Bonney, and set out on February 18.

Precisely what happened on the trail to Lincoln that late afternoon is not known, but by dusk the Brady posse had caught up with Tunstall and his men, there was an exchange of gunfire, and Tunstall died from bullet wounds in his head and chest.

Now the match had been touched to the trail of powder.

The Tunstall-McSween bloc vowed to avenge the Englishman's death and the Kid, who said Tunstall "was the only man I ever worked for who treated me fairly," became an impassioned member of the group, which at its peak numbered as high as sixty men. The avenging faction, calling themselves "the Regulators," won an early victory by being deputized by a sympathetic Lincoln justice of the peace and early in March, at a place in the foothills of the Captain Mountains portentously called Dead Man's Draw, located and killed two of Brady's possemen.

Governor Axtell now declared the Regulators outlaws and placed a two hundred dollar reward on each of their heads, but this had no deterring effect. On April 1, Billy and five other Regulators made their way into Lincoln and hid behind the adobe wall of a corral adjoining the Tunstall-McSween store. When Sheriff Brady and four of his deputies,

BETTMANN ARCHIVE

Engraving of Billy the Kid shooting down a foe who had taken refuge behind a saloon bar.

Directions to Billy the Kid Country

The Kid's country is southwest, central, and east-central New Mexico. Key highways (consult any road map or road atlas) are interstates 10, 25, and 40, and U.S. highways 54, 60, 70, 180, and 380. Points of special interest include:

- **Silver City** (U.S. 180), where the Kid spent his boyhood, went to school, and had his first brushes with the law.
- **La Mesilla** (off I-10 at State Road 28), called "Old Mesilla" today, where the Kid was tried and convicted of killing Sheriff Brady.
- **Fort Stanton** (U.S. 380, State Road 214), hub of military activity during the Lincoln County War.
- **Blazer's Mill** (U.S. 70 near Ruidoso), where Buckshot Roberts and Regulator Dick Brewer were killed.
- **Stinking Springs** (U.S. 60 near Taiban), where the Kid, Tom O'Folliard, Charlie Bowdre, and others had a shootout with Garrett and his posse in December 1880.
- **Fort Sumner** (U.S. 60), where the Kid, Bowdre, and Tom O'Folliard are buried.

And, most important, **Lincoln** (U.S. 380), the hub of the Lincoln County War, the place where the Kid was jailed while awaiting execution, and where he killed deputies Olinger and Bell. In Billy's time, Lincoln had a population of about four hundred; today there are about seventy-five full-time residents. Nestled in the wooded hillsides of the Rio Bonito, virtually every building in the town has historical significance and many have been restored to their original condition, including the Wortley Hotel, the Montano Store, Tunstall Store (now a museum), courthouse, and the stone "Torreon," a watchtower once used as a defense against Apaches as well as a nest for Murphy-Dolan snipers during the five-day battle.

"Old Lincoln Days," a celebration of the town's history, is held annually with a folk pageant that includes a reenactment of "The Last Escape of Billy the Kid." The 1995 celebration will be held August 4–6. For more information, write to the Lincoln County Heritage Trust, P.O. Box 98, Lincoln, New Mexico 88338.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL E. PITEL

Billy the Kid's grave at Fort Sumner.

walking down Lincoln's main street toward the courthouse, drew near the Tunstall corral, the Regulators opened fire. Brady, clearly the bull's-eye of the ambush, was struck by eight bullets and died in the street, along with one of his deputies. Billy took a slight gunshot wound in the thigh as he ran into the street to grab the dead sheriff's rifle, but he and the Regulators made their way out of town relatively unscathed.

Four days after the Lincoln shootout a band of Regulators were camped at Blazer's Mill, southeast of Lincoln. In the group were the Kid, Dick Brewer, Lincoln County ranchers George and Frank Coe, and Charles Bowdre, a Southern drifter and McSween adherent. On April 5, 1878, a man named Andrew L. "Buckshot" Roberts rode his mule into the camp. Little is known about Roberts except that he was young, short, and very foolish. He is believed to have served in the Texas Rangers, where in some nameless battle he took a shotgun wound that crippled his right shoulder, and he may have been a deserter from the army out of Fort Stanton. One Lincoln County War historian says he operated a Murphy-owned store at South Fork, near the Mescalero Apache Agency, was a well-known Murphy-Dolan man, and probably had been among the possemen who killed John Tunstall.

One thing seems certain: Roberts blithely rode into the Regulators' camp at Blazer's Mill to collect the two hundred dollar reward offered for the apprehension of Sheriff Brady's killers. When the tables were turned on him, and Dick Brewer demanded that he surrender and hand over his weapons, Roberts refused and a gunfight followed. In the hail of bullets, Charlie Bowdre shot Roberts in the stomach but the fatally wounded man made his way into a small building, dragged a mattress to the doorway, and with a hunting rifle he found inside kept up a withering fire on the Regulators. Roberts killed Brewer with a shot through the head and wounded four others—grazing the Kid with one shot—and died from his belly wound the next day. He was buried next to Brewer on the Blazer's Mill grounds.

In the three months that followed this affair, the tool of the Santa Fe Ring, Governor Axtell,

asked President Rutherford B. Hayes to send federal troops to assist territorial officers in restoring law and order in Lincoln County. Soldiers from Fort Stanton actually were sent to Lincoln that summer of 1878, but only as observers. They departed on June 29.

The next month the great showdown of the war took place.

On July 14, some sixty McSween men, old and new Regulators, gathered at the lawyer's spacious adobe home in Lincoln. Allied against them and headquartered in the Wortley Hotel, just down the street from the McSween house, were about forty Dolan supporters. These latter were led by the new sheriff, George W. Peppin, a former stonemason and Dolan employee who had been present at the killing of Sheriff Brady on April 1.

For two days these factions fired sporadically at one another and shouted insults. On the fourth day of the "battle," the commander of Fort Stanton, a pompous peacock of an officer and pro-Dolan man, Lt. Col. Nathan A. M. Dudley, arrived in Lincoln with thirty-five men, a mountain howitzer, and a Gatling gun. He came ostensibly to protect the women and children of the town, and soon after his arrival, seeing as it were the bullet pocks on the wall, the McSween forces began to evaporate, leaving McSween, his wife Susan, and about fourteen men bottled up inside the adobe house.

On July 19, despite the efforts of Susan McSween to talk with Colonel Dudley, the house was set on fire. The wooden walls and fixtures inside the adobe structure burned slowly but inexorably, and as darkness approached, the Kid organized an escape. He and four other Regulators slipped out of the house and into the darkness. Alexander McSween tried to surrender but was shot down yelling,

In Lincoln, the Kid awaited his execution in the second-floor jail of the county's new courthouse.

"Oh, Lord, Lord, save me!" Three other of his partisans were killed in the backyard of the burning house.

The "Five-Day Battle," which cost the lives of two Dolan supporters, McSween, and five Regulators, brought the feud to an end.

In September 1878, President Hayes recalled Governor Axtell and replaced him with fifty-one-year-old Lew Wallace, once the youngest Union Army major general in the Civil War and soon-to-be author of the acclaimed Biblical epic *Ben Hur, A Tale of Christ.* Wallace came to the office with a long list of warrants for the arrest of Regulators including one made out for "William H. Antrim, alias Kid, alias Bonney," but in November issued an amnesty proclamation and journeyed from Santa Fe to Lincoln to interview participants in the recent conflict there.

The amnesty decree did not apply to the Kid since he was under previous indictments in the territorial court for the killing of Sheriff Brady and in federal court for the killing of Buckshot Roberts. Even so, Governor Wallace was anxious to bring the whole nasty matter to an end, and in an exchange of letters, promised Billy protection from prosecution in exchange for testimony on what he knew of the Lincoln County troubles and participants.

Wallace and the Kid met in the home of a justice of the peace in Lincoln on March 17, 1879. In a memorable historical scene, the refined Lew Wallace of Indiana—lawyer, musician, author, veteran of the Mexican War, hero of Shiloh and numerous other Civil War battles, and now governor of New Mexico Territory—sat in the candlelight of a low *jacal* (adobe hut) in the middle of nowhere, tensely awaiting the arrival of a nineteen-year-old boy-outlaw.

The Kid came, Winchester in hand, wearing a new hat and bandanna. He was about five foot eight, slender, with small hands and feet, clean-shaven and showing a toothy grin. He exuded some of the qualities Wallace had heard about—he was a likable but tightly coiled lad and clearly a tough one when crossed.

The details of the conversation are not known, but in general, the Kid agreed to testify in the matter of the murder of a McSween ally, the lawyer Huston Chapman, that occurred after the Five-Day battle. He subsequently did so, then rode out of town to put some distance between himself and the law of Lincoln County.

Based at old Fort Sumner, a hundred miles northeast of Lincoln, the Kid and a few comrades undertook some cattle rustling—stealing from John Chisum, among others—and settled into a relatively ordinary life on the run.

(It was during this period that the Kid had his picture taken in Fort Sumner. He posed with his Winchester carbine and .41 caliber single-action Colt revolver, and the tintype photograph, sometimes reversed to give the erroneous impression that he was left-handed, is the only likeness of him in existence.)

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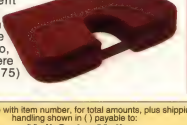

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In late 1880, the final character in the Billy the Kid drama arrived on stage. He was the new sheriff of Lincoln County, Patrick Floyd Jarvis Garrett, a former trail driver and buffalo hunter in Texas—a tough, relentless six foot five, Alabama-born string bean with a big mustache. Garrett's first duty as sheriff was to track down the Kid, upon whose head a five hundred dollar reward had been placed.

He lost no time. On December 23, Garrett and his posse descended on the abandoned cow camp east of Fort Sumner called Stinking Springs where, in a small stone house, the Kid and four confederates were sleeping. In the opening skirmish, Charlie Bowdre, a survivor of the McSween house siege, was killed. The small skirmish continued through the day until the Kid and the others surrendered. After a brief jailing in Fort Sumner, the prisoners were taken to Santa Fe, and the Kid was then removed to the town of Mesilla to stand trial in district court for the murder of Sheriff Brady nearly three years before.

The trial took two days and on April 13, 1881, Judge Warren H. Bristol ordered the defendant to be taken to Lincoln and confined in the Lincoln County jail until May 13. On that date, between 9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M., the judge said, "the said William Bonney, alias Kid, alias William Antrim, will be hanged by the neck until his body be dead." (One account of the sentencing has Judge Bristol intoning, "You are sentenced to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead," to which Billy responded, "And you can go to hell, hell, hell!")

In Lincoln, he awaited his execution in the second-floor jail of the county's new courthouse, the old Murphy-Dolan store. He was shackled with leg irons and handcuffs inside his cell and guarded—along with five other prisoners in the jail—by deputies Robert M. Olinger, a tall, weighty, long-haired man with a pock-marked face and a killer's reputation (he was under a murder indictment on the day he died), and James W. Bell, a former Texas Ranger with a great knife scar on the left side of his face. From all accounts, Olinger was a belligerent deputy and seemed to take pleasure in tormenting Billy—including such acts as dramatically loading his shotgun outside the Kid's cell—about his impending execution while Bell was more considerate and sympathetic. Olinger had been warned by a friend that if he was not watched every moment, if he was given the remotest opportunity, the Kid would escape. Olinger's view on the matter was that the Kid had as much chance of escaping as he had of going to heaven.

NOBODY WAS TALKING, BUT PAT GARRETT WAS ABLE TO PIECE TOGETHER INFORMATION THAT THE KID MIGHT BE STAYING AT PETE MAXWELL'S.

In the early evening of April 28, 1881, with Sheriff Garrett out of town, Olinger took the five other prisoners across the street to the Wortley Hotel for supper, leaving Bell behind to guard the Kid. At about 6:00 P.M., the Kid asked Bell to take him to the privy behind the courthouse. Upon their return, with Bell lagging behind, the Kid climbed the stairs, worked his small hand out of one of the cuffs, turned, and swung the loose cuff at Bell's face, cutting the deputy with it. In the struggle that followed on the stairway, the Kid grabbed Bell's revolver and shot the deputy with it. Bell ran out the door and into the arms of a Lincoln citizen, sagged, and died.

The Kid, meantime, found Olinger's shotgun and stationed himself at a jail floor window overlooking the yard at the side of the courthouse. Olinger, who heard the gunshots, emerged from the hotel, ran across the street, and entered the fenced yard. Above him the Kid said, "Look up, old boy, and see what you get." The deputy looked up and the Kid fired both barrels of the shotgun into the face and trunk of his nemesis. Olinger died instantly.

(One melodramatic and highly suspicious account of this incident has Godfrey Gauss, the citizen standing with the body of the other deputy, shouting "Bob, the Kid has killed Bell," whereupon Olinger looked up at the window and said, "Yes, and he's killed me, too.")

Gauss, who knew the Kid and frightenedly followed the escapee's orders, supplied a pick that Billy used to break his ankle irons and brought a saddled horse from a nearby corral. Meantime, a crowd of Lincoln citizens had gathered but made no attempt to subdue the outlaw. The Kid apologized for killing Bell, then broke Olinger's shotgun over a porch railing and threw the pieces at the dead deputy, saying, "You are not going to round me up again."

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Nearly an hour had passed after the killing of Olinger before the Kid, his leg irons dangling and burdened with the sidearms and rifles taken from the jail, was able to mount the skittish horse and ride out of Lincoln.

Instead of riding hell-for-leather for Mexico, Billy rode to Fort Sumner, where he had a girlfriend and several pals, and compounded this foolhardy act by making no effort to conceal his whereabouts. Friends reported to Garrett that the Kid was roaming the country between White Oaks, the mining town near Carrizozo, and Fort Sumner, and identified the Kid's girlfriend in Sumner and others who were harboring the fugitive.

Garrett and two deputies rode out from Roswell to Fort Sumner on July 10, arrived on the outskirts of the fort on July 13, and spent the day trying to ferret out information on Billy's whereabouts. Nobody was talking, but the sheriff was able to piece together scraps of information that the Kid might be staying at cattleman Pete Maxwell's place, a former barracks building on the old army post. On the night of the thirteenth Garrett and his men crept into the barracks compound and found Maxwell's building.

They waited in a nearby orchard until just after midnight. Then Garrett, who left his two companions outside, moved carefully along the roofed porch and entered Maxwell's bedroom, woke the rancher up, and asked the Kid's whereabouts. By now the Kid had emerged from his room to cut meat from a beef carcass hanging from the porch rafter some distance away. As he returned, he came face-to-face with John Poe, one of the Garrett men on the porch. Gun drawn, the kid backed into Maxwell's bedroom saying, *"¿Quién es? Quién es?"* Inside the room he spotted the vague shape of Maxwell on the bed in the darkness and said, "Who are those fellows outside, Pete?" At the same moment, Garrett emerged from the shadows and the Kid fell back, again saying, *"¿Quién es? Quién es?"* while pointing his revolver at the lawman. Garrett fired twice and heard a groan from the other side of the room.

The Kid died from a bullet just over his heart. His pistol and a butcher knife lay at his side. The next day his body, neatly dressed, was placed in a wooden coffin to be buried in the military cemetery next to two other Regulators and veterans of the Lincoln County War, Charlie Bowdre and Tom O'Folliard. ⊠

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a conversation with Baxter

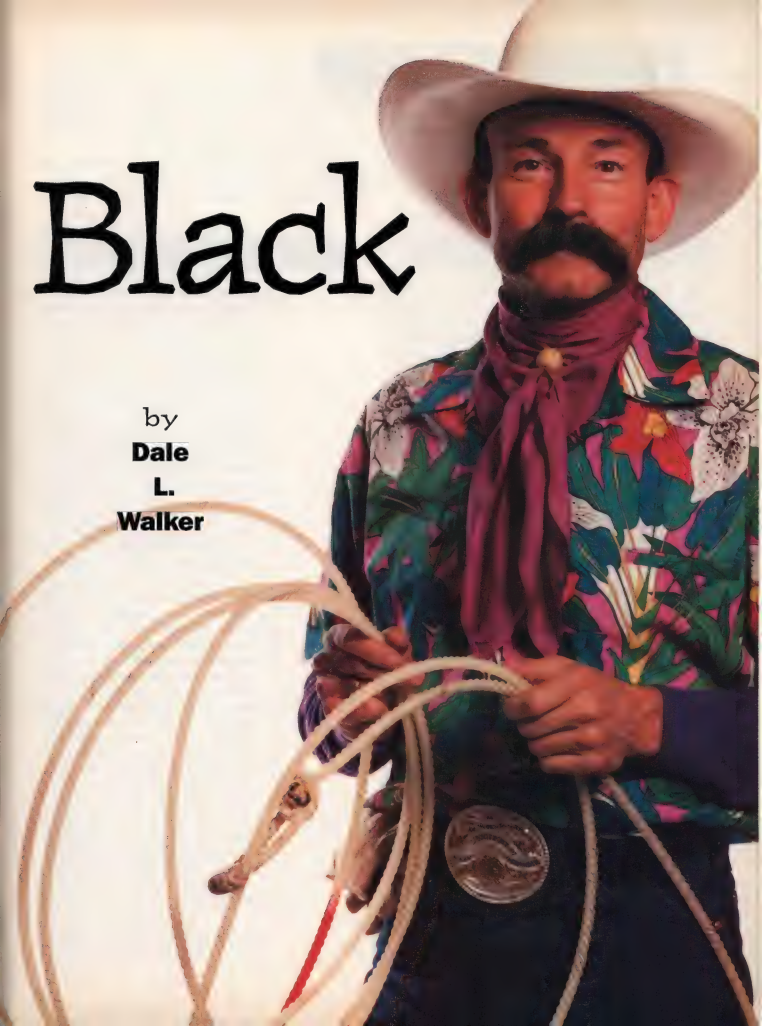
The eminent author and critic Calvin Trillin wrote in the *New York Times* in April 1994 that he had met Baxter Black at a booksellers' meeting in Denver at the time Black was promoting his new book, *Croutons on a Cow Pie II*. "I felt an immediate kinship with him," Trillin said, "partly, I think, because choosing among all his impressive reviews, Baxter had decided to put on the back of that book a single quotation that I identify with. A line from the *Des Moines Register*, it said in the unadorned prose traditionally favored on the range, 'Baxter Black is not your normal poet.'"

He has been compared to Mark Twain and proclaimed "the Art Buchwald of the jeans-and-Stetson crowd." Dirk Mathison of *People* magazine has called him "an American original," the *Denver Post* characterized him as "Will Rogers's weird grandson," and Johnny Carson, after hearing Black recite one of his hilarious poems in a "Tonight Show" appearance, said, "It's just a tragedy that Keats didn't live to hear this." Feature stories about him have appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and *The National Geographic*. But Trillin, in selecting the line from the Des Moines paper, hit upon the finest and truest thing ever written about America's best-known, best-selling cowboy poet.

Black himself, with a sort of back door reference to his other career as a large-animal veterinarian, frames his success this way: "I know who I am, and while I write for cowboys

Black

by
Dale
L.
Walker



The Vegetarian's Nightmare

a dissertation on plants' rights

Ladies and diners I make you
A shameful, degrading confession.
A deed of disgrace in the name of good taste
Though I did it, I meant no aggression.

I had planted a garden last April
And lovingly sang it a ballad.
But later in June beneath a full moon
Forgive me, I wanted a salad!

So I slipped out and fondled a carrot
Caressing its feathery top.
With the force of a brute I tore out the root!
It whimpered and came with a pop!

Then laying my hand on a radish
I jerked and it left a small crater.
Then with the blade of my True Value spade
I exhumed a slumbering tater!

Celery I plucked, I twisted a squash!
Tomatoes were wincing in fear.
I choked the romaine. It screamed out in pain,
Their anguish was filling my ears!

I finally came to the lettuce
As it cringed at the top of the row
With one wicked slice I beheaded it twice
As it writhed, I dealt a death blow.

I butchered the onions and parsley.
My hoe was all covered with gore.
I chopped and I whacked without looking back
Then I stealthily slipped in the door.

My bounty lay naked and dying
So I drowned them to snuff out their life.
I sliced and I peeled as they thrashed and they reeled
On the cutting board under my knife.

I violated tomatoes
So their innards could never survive.
I grated and ground 'til they made not a sound
Then I boiled the tater alive!

Then I took the small broken pieces
I had tortured and killed with my hands
And tossed them together, heedless of whether
They suffered or made their demands.

I ate them. Forgive me, I'm sorry
But hear me, though I'm a beginner
Those plants feel pain, though it's hard to explain
To someone who eats them for dinner!

I intend to begin a crusade
For PLANT'S RIGHTS, including chick peas.
The A.C.L.U. will be helping me, too.
In the meantime, please pass the bleu cheese.

and agriculture people—people out there punching cows and shoeing horses—there are a lot of folks who enjoy hearing from a man like me who has had his arm up a cow's butt."

His twelve books of poems, published by his own Coyote Cowboy Company in Brighton, Colorado, have sold over 250,000 copies. He produces a new paperback book of poems every two years and each sells from 25,000 to 40,000 copies. His newest book, *Dunny and the Duck*, came out in mid-September 1994 and by Christmas had sold 12,250 copies. His single novel, *Hey, Cowboy, Wanna Get Lucky?* (Crown, 1994), the only Baxter Black book not published by his own company, is in its eighth printing, with 38,000 copies in hardback, and has been purchased for a paperback edition. His *Cowboy Coyote Poetry* (1986) is the best-selling book of cowboy poetry of all time, with 63,000 copies sold, in hardcover, to date. Last year alone the Coyote Cowboy Company sold 25,000 books, 23,000 audiocassettes, and 7,500 videocassettes of Black's works.

In addition he gives over a hundred performances—"shows," as opposed to "readings"—every year, appears regularly on National Public Radio, has done PBS television specials, has his own commercial radio program, and writes a weekly column, "On the Edge of Common Sense," which appears in 150 publications, including such newspapers as the *Cabool Enterprise* (Cabool, Missouri), *The Muleshoe Journal* (Muleshoe, Texas); the *Owyhee Avalanche* (Homedale, Idaho), *Grainews* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada), *Virginia Cattleman* (Daleville, Virginia), *Livestock Weekly* (San Angelo, Texas) and the (Concord, California) *California Farmer*.

Black, who is fifty, grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where

his father was dean of agriculture at New Mexico State University. "All I have ever wanted to do was to be in the cattle business," he says, and so he majored in animal science and agriculture at NMSU. He decided later he wanted a "trade" as well as a profession—work that would involve his hands as well as his brain—and so he switched to veterinary medicine and earned his D.V.M. degree at Colorado State University.

He worked for a time as vet for the Diamond A Cattle Company in New Mexico and California; was employed as a resident vet for ten years for Simplot, a huge livestock and feedlot company in Idaho; and worked out of Denver for a pharmaceutical firm, doing "trouble calls."

During his work for Simplot in Idaho, Black wrote his first cowboy poem, "The Cowboy and His Dog." He had made numerous humorous speeches for "ag people"

The Rancher and the Banker

The rancher sat across the desk
applying for a loan.
He'd never borrowed cash before,
he'd made it on his own
But times were hard, as he explained
and if they only could,
He'd like to borrow twenty grand.
The banker understood.

"That doesn't sound unreasonable,
although it's quite a lot.
Your cows can be collateral.
How many cows you got?"
"Two hundred head," the rancher said,
"That's give or take a few."
"Well, that's enough," the banker said,
"Of course there's interest due."

In three months' time the rancher came
and paid the loan in full
But in his poke he had some left
that was expendable.
"Why don't you leave that cash with me,"
the banker said, content,
"You put your money in my bank
I'll pay ya eight percent."

The rancher paused, "Now let me see…
you gave me twenty grand
And then I paid you extra back
for lendin' me a hand.
Now I give you this pile of cash
and you pay me this time
The extry that I done forked out,
at slightly over prime?"

The banker nodded helpfully
and lit himself a smoke.
The rancher seemed to cogitate
and then he finally spoke,
"I ain't too good at high finance…
you've put me on the spot
But fair is fair, so tell me, sir,
how many cows you got?"

The Practitioner's Lot

Today in the world of modern vets
I've lost my place in line
My colleagues have prospered as specialists
In therio or swine.

I see their achievements in magazines,
Their articles in print.
They've developed a brand new cure for warts
With after dinner mints.

Or they're recognized as the final word
In matters so complex
That I can't pronounce what they're working on
Much less, what it affects!

I spend my days at the back of a cow
Usually up to my chin
In the process of pullin' somethin' out
Or pushin' it back in!

Or I'm tryin' to pass a catheter
to move a calculi
While the cat is tearin' my arm to shreds
And spraying my good tie!

I dream to discover a new technique
But it's not meant to be.
The chances are slim that they'd even name
A prolapse after me!

But I'm thankful I've got a good practice
With loyal clientele
Who, in spite of my vast shortcomings, still
Try and speak of me well.

Why, just last week two farmers were talkin'
Outside my clinic door
"Doc ain't perfect, but for our little town
We couldn't ask for more."

"Yeah, I'll agree," the second one answered,
"I've given it some thought,
With Doc you always git yer money's worth
But…he don't charge a lot!"

Black, a former veterinarian, says, "There are a lot of folks who enjoy hearing from a man who has had his arm up a cow's butt."

as a company vet, had sharpened his poetry skills in writing songs, and by 1982 was able to launch a new career as an after-dinner speaker and—in a time when such a craft was virtually unknown—as a cowboy poet.

Black is a lanky—let's face it, skinny (his big silver belt buckle seems to span about a third of his waist)—hard-muscled man with a huge Sam Elliott-type walrus mustache. He wears a "silver belly," sometimes a black, cowboy hat pulled down to his eyebrows, a yoked western shirt, jeans, and black boots. He has an elastic face that accommodates any number of expressions and a deep baritone voice that varies in tone and volume from a booming exclamation point to a slightly salacious whisper as he recites a poem in one of his shows and is straightforward "folksy," always laced with humor, in ordinary conversation.

He studies poetry and knows the great poets. His conversation is filled with references to Banjo Paterson, Rudyard Kipling, Robert W. Service, and others—particularly those who sought, as he does, "perfect meter and perfect rhyme." And he speaks lovingly of "poets who use poetry to do humor," such as Ogden Nash.

Black, his wife Cindy Lou, daughter Jennifer, and son Guy live on a twenty-acre spread north of Brighton where he has some cows, horses, and a dog named Boller. The self-declared "cowboy poet, ex-veterinarian, starvin' cattle feeder, and sorry team roper" answered *LLWM*'s questions while on the road, preparing to speak to an ag group in Arkansas.

LLWM: Is it true that you once appeared on a television show with Dolly Parton and Little Richard?

BLACK: I was on Dolly Parton's very first television show in Hollywood. She also had Peewee Herman and Little Richard. Herman was fine, Little Richard a disaster. The show bombed. They wanted me to do "The Vegetarian's Nightmare"—this was the year I had done it on Johnny Carson. The producer wanted me to sit in the audience and get up and recite the poem while Dolly held the microphone. I said I wished he wouldn't do that to me—the poem takes a lot of room—but he said it was a great idea. Dolly Parton is a very tiny woman. It didn't work.

LLWM: I was sitting with western novelist Dick House once when you were reciting "The Vegetarian's Nightmare" and he was eating a big steak. He almost fell on the floor laughing at that poem. Besides being hilarious, is there a "message" in it?

BLACK: Not really a message. I'm not that deep. My favorite quote is from the Reverend Sidney Smith, a nineteenth century English theologian, who said, "Do not assume because I am frivolous that I am shallow, just as I do not assume that because you are grave you are profound." I wrote that vegetarian poem after being invited to speak to a group of animal rights people in Pocatello, Idaho, in about 1979 or 1980. I was no different then than I am now and I don't mind challenging people—without being belligerent. (Lord spare me from zealots from either side!)

LLWM: Is "The Vegetarian Nightmare" among the most requested of your works?

BLACK: The poem is still very popular and I still throw it in once in a while. I'm going to do it tomorrow, in fact, when I speak to the Arkansas Plant and Food Society. The theme of it is that some people suggest that plants feel pain—I didn't make that up. It was not written to browbeat vegetarians but to be performed in fun; not to convert anyone, but just to make an observation. I have a similar theme in the poem "The AARP" in *Croutons on a Cow Pie II*, which addresses wearing fur, and another one in the book called *Cowboy Standard Time* that is about Genesis versus evolution. In the new book, *Dunny and the Duck*, I have one called "The Wilderness Wall," which is about our loving our national parks to death. They are all subjects that are very, very touchy, but I try to lend a little common sense to them without becoming a strident screamer for either side. My most requested poem for years was "One More Year"—about an old rancher saving a cow for one more year. Today the most requested one is "The Oyster."

"'The Oyster' is about a man whose eastern sweetheart sees oysters on a cafe sign and doesn't realize what kind they are."

LLWM: I remember you reciting "The Oyster" on the "Tonight Show" when Rita Moreno was another guest. She didn't seem to get it, but Johnny Carson and the audience sure did.

BLACK: The poem has to do with a cowboy's eastern sweetheart who sees oysters on a cafe sign but doesn't realize the *kind* of oysters being advertised. The punch line is:

"I like them fresh," the sweetheart said and laid her menu down.
Then ordered oysters for them both when the waiter came around.
The cowboy smiled gamely, though her words stuck in his craw
But he finally fainted dead away when she said, "I'll have mine raw!"

Rita Moreno didn't get it. During a commercial break I explained the poem was about *mountain* oysters, not the Bluepoints and Chesapeakes from back East. I got a laugh out of her I could have used when I was reciting it.

LLWM: You say you strive for perfect meter and perfect rhyme. Is this important because your poems are meant to be performed—read aloud?

BLACK: When I write a poem I am always thinking in terms of performing it, and when I want to know if it's well written, I give it to someone like my wife or daughter and have them read it back to me cold. You can do this in the privacy of your own home. If you read one of my poems out loud and it rolls off your tongue and would be funny if you read it to someone else—then I think I have written it well.

LLWM: What else is important in a poem?

BLACK: Original thought is probably the most important because if you are technically good but the poem is boring or trite, you've lost the battle. It doesn't matter how many songs have been written about love so long as there is a new twist on it. Cowboy poetry is basically about getting bucked off and everybody needs to have their own twist on that, not somebody else's warmed over. Another thing is the strong ending. It's important to have a punch line when you are performing.

LLWM: You have been described as a combination of Ogden Nash and Festus.

BLACK: That combination is an interesting one. I *am* a fan of Ogden Nash—any man who can rhyme *tarantulas* with *Los Angeles* is pretty good in my book. I knew "Festus"—the late Ken Curtis—and the connection with me was probably to illustrate "a little bit of a hayseed," which is okay with me.

LLWM: What other modern poets do you like? Any that you could say inspired you?

BLACK: I like a lot of them. Wallace McCrae from Coldstrip, Montana, is to me probably the best. He's got his own style that nobody can duplicate. Elizabeth Ebert from Thunderhawk, South Dakota, writes beautiful stuff in the style of, say, Robert Service. Red Steagall, who has written songs forever, has a deep sense of history, primarily of Texas, and he writes beautiful, sympathetic, almost Hallmark-cardish—in the best sense—poems.

LLWM: Once, in another interview we did together, you mentioned as among your favorite poets Jim Bollers of Hudson, Colorado: Banjo Paterson of Australia; and Carlos Ashley, the former state senator from Llano, Texas.

BLACK: Jim Bollers's poetry could not be put on paper. It was barroom poetry that rang and sang—you could feel the punches and taste the whiskey—and I just loved it. Carlos Ashley, who died last year, wrote perfect meter and perfect rhyme—something I value. The master of that is A. B. "Banjo" Paterson, a lawyer who wrote the book *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses.*

LLWM: I know you also love Rudyard Kipling and Robert W. Service's work. What of modern poetry—the kind that rarely rhymes, has no meter, but wins Pulitzer Prizes?

BLACK: Academic poets today wouldn't even call Kipling and Service poets. When they write

"I went to the first big gathering of cowboy poets in Elko, Nevada. I was stunned that so many people were writing cowboy poetry."

academic poetry, their audience is very, very small—but they can still write "poet" on their business cards. Now, along comes a group of lunatics calling themselves "cowboy poets," and an unknowing interviewer might ask one of these Pulitzer Prize poets, "Why isn't your stuff popular and theirs is?" An academic once told me that I am a "cowboy versifier, not a poet." That helps both of us avoid comparison.

LLWM: Why is it that Kipling, Service, and the others are remembered and so often quoted?

BLACK: The kind of poetry Paterson, Ashley, Kipling, and Service wrote lives on because anyone can read their work and commit it to memory. The other kind of poetry is still poetry and I can write that, too, but the problem is that those poems are almost impossible to commit to memory.

LLWM: You were already earning a living with your poetry when the first big gathering of cowboy poets was held in Elko, Nevada, in 1985. What do you remember of it?

BLACK: I went to that Elko gathering reluctantly. I had been doing what I am doing now—a lot of after-dinner speaking at ag groups and county fairs, and had been calling myself a cowboy poet since 1982. That Elko meeting was the atom bomb that started everything. It attracted four or five thousand people. I was stunned that so many people were writing cowboy poetry. It was a delight to hear them and to meet somebody of the quality of Wallace McRae. Elko is still a huge deal. It has spawned something like 140 similar gatherings now.

LLWM: Do you still attend the Elko gathering?

BLACK: I go to Elko and a few other of the gatherings, but since I make my living at ag banquets I reserve my "freebies" almost exclusively for ag things—4-H Kids, Cowbelles, FFA banquets, and the like.

LLWM: In one of your books, when you are explaining what you see as your job in "turning over our sanctimonious stones" and "looking at the holes in the queen's underwear," you say, "Unfortunately, the peeing cow gets her own hocks wet." What does that mean?

BLACK: Well, first, you have to understand that I'm a livestock person, my poems are about rural people, and my subject matter is inevitably agricultural because that is what I know. I "pick on" these people, but I pick on myself, too, because I am one of them. Thus the image of the peeing cow.

LLWM: I get it now. Are there recurring "themes" in your poems —such things as the interference of the government in ranch operations, the relationship between the banker and stockman, the life and lot of the cowboy, dogs, weather?

BLACK: There are recurring themes, no question about it. I write about what I know. I know about cows, sheep, horses, feedlots, ranch work, team roping, vets, farm wives, feeding cows, borrowing money to feed cows, weather—a lot about weather. To people who make a living off the land, weather is critical in a way it isn't to town people.

LLWM: Your lines—"I spend my days at the back of a cow / Usually up to my chin / In the process of pullin' somethin' out / Or pushin' it back in"—seem to sum up your work as a veterinarian. Did you like this work?

BLACK: I loved it. Cow medicine was my big deal so "pulling something out or pushing it back in" were two common procedures: pulling a calf out or pushing a prolapsed uterus back in. I went to vet school because I felt more comfortable having a trade. With an ag school degree I'd go to work at a feedlot or livestock outfit and in ten years be in middle management; as a vet I could go to work with a livestock outfit and when somebody asked me, "What can you do?" I'd say, "I can fix your cow."

LLWM: What circumstances made you abandon this work?

BLACK: It was one of those forks in the road that caused me to quit vet work, or it to quit me.

"I patted my pockets and realized I didn't have any keys. It was symbolic of starting over. I call it 'being down to no keys.'"

I was never in private practice; I worked for two large livestock companies over a period of years—the Diamond A out of Roswell and the Simplot Company out of Idaho. In 1980 I left Idaho and moved to Denver. I was single, on the road, working for a pharmaceutical company doing trouble calls. People would call up and say, "Your vaccine killed our cow." I'd go out there and say, "No, it didn't."

LLWM: And you began doing some ag group speeches?

BLACK: Yes, that was the real beginning of my leaving vet work. In Denver I was doing some educational-type speeches, but humorous nonetheless, and the company I was working for received many requests for me to speak to local cattle feeders or pork producers or stock associations. So, when I left the vaccine company, I began to get paid for these appearances. I figured I could do the speeches and still look for a job at a place that needed a resident veterinarian, but the phone never quit ringing. So, I didn't get into the poetry business on purpose. But I've been doing it since the fall of 1982 and the phone still rings. We've never had to solicit business and that eliminates having to hire booking agents, managers, and all the folderol that goes with show business.

LLWM: One more vet question: I think in the poem "The Vet'inary's Laundry" you speak of "organophosphate fragrance," "rumen contents," and "fetotomy remains." What are these?

BLACK: It's the truth in poems that makes them funny. These all mean something to veterinarians—organophosphate fragrance comes from the chemicals you put on cows for lice, ticks, and grubs. And there are two things you can't get off your hands—the stench of rumen contents and fetotomy remains. The exposure to rumen—stomach—contents comes during a necropsy, when you cut up a dead cow to see what killed it; fetotomy remains come from cutting up a dead calf inside the uterus and pulling it out without having to do invasive surgery. That's what a fetotomy is—cutting up the fetus.

LLWM: I'm really glad I asked about that. You wrote somewhere about the low point in your career being in 1980 in Nampa, Idaho, when you were broke, getting a divorce, and had as your sole possessions a deer head and a piano?

BLACK: I remember the man I had hired to replace me as the vet for this company that I loved working for in Idaho. He took me to the airport in Boise in *my* vet truck that he was going to take over. I had shipped the deer head and piano on to Denver. We stood curbside at the airport, me with my hanging bag and leaving ten years of my life and all my friends behind. I was miserable, down to 145 pounds, physically and emotionally devastated, standing there like an orphan. He shook my hand and wished me good luck and asked me did I have everything. I patted my pockets and realized I didn't have any keys. No house key, no car key, no locker-in-a-bus-station key—nothing. I call it "being down to no keys." It was symbolic of starting over.

LLWM: While you were in Idaho you wrote "The Cowboy and His Dog." Was this your first poem?

BLACK: I think it was my first poem; it was in that first book, anyway. I had a job as a company vet for this outfit in Idaho that had three feedlots, eight ranches, two big sheep operations, and a feedstore, and I was the only person other than the boss to visit all these operations regularly, making a big circle. So I was the grapevine for the gossip, stories, and jokes. I had spent the night up above Malta, Idaho, with my friend Jim Carter, who was cattle foreman on this outfit, and we were coming down off the mountain. It was in the fall, a gorgeous morning, and we stopped and could see, down in this valley where Malta lay, the cowboys bringing the cows up to the corral where I was headed to do preg checks, ear tags, and vaccinations. I saw those cows break and scatter and way off in the distance in the stillness of the morning I heard voices say, "Git out of the gate! Go git in the pickup!"—cowboys yelling at their dogs. It's the most common command you hear. It's the only poem I've written

> "I don't write dirty or blue. It won't be tolerated at ag banquets. You can't be dirty and you can't be drunk."

that made one of my books that has any cussing in it. I don't write dirty or blue. It won't be tolerated at ag banquets. You can't be dirty and you can't be drunk.

LLWM: Your first novel, *Hey, Cowboy, Wanna Get Lucky?*, was published last year by Crown. I understand you actually wrote the book ten years ago. How did that deal work out?

BLACK: I wrote that novel out of insomnia in 1982, finished four hundred pages, and sent it to some writers I admired—Hunter S. Thompson, Dan Jenkins, Thomas MacGuane, John Nichols, and Tom Robbins. Robbins answered. He is the author of the greatest philosophy book of all time, *Still Life With Woodpecker*. He said I needed an agent—"Take mine"—so I sent the book to his agent in New York, who took it around for a year and sent it back. Ten years go by and Crown Publishing calls one day out of the clear blue and is interested in publishing my poetry. I said, "Where were you when I needed you?" I listened but told them I think I sell more poetry books than you do and I am my own middle man. They asked if I had anything else, and I said I have this old novel. They read it, printed 15,000 copies, and sold it out before the book came out. Now it's in its eighth printing. Crown came back with a two-book offer, but I don't know if I have another novel in me and have told them that.

LLWM: Is it true you bought a load of corral poles with the advance on *Hey, Cowboy?*

BLACK: Yes, but I could have bought them anyway.

LLWM: How important is the money?

BLACK: Leon Uris had a hero in *Mitla Pass* who is an author and he makes the distinction of writing "to have" and writing "to be." I've never been good at writing to have.

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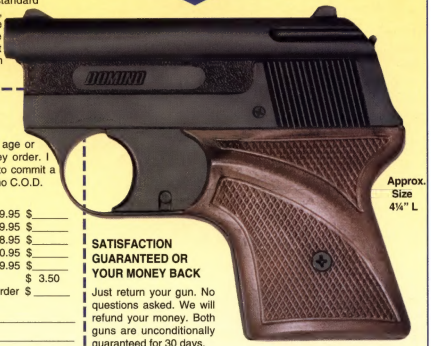

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